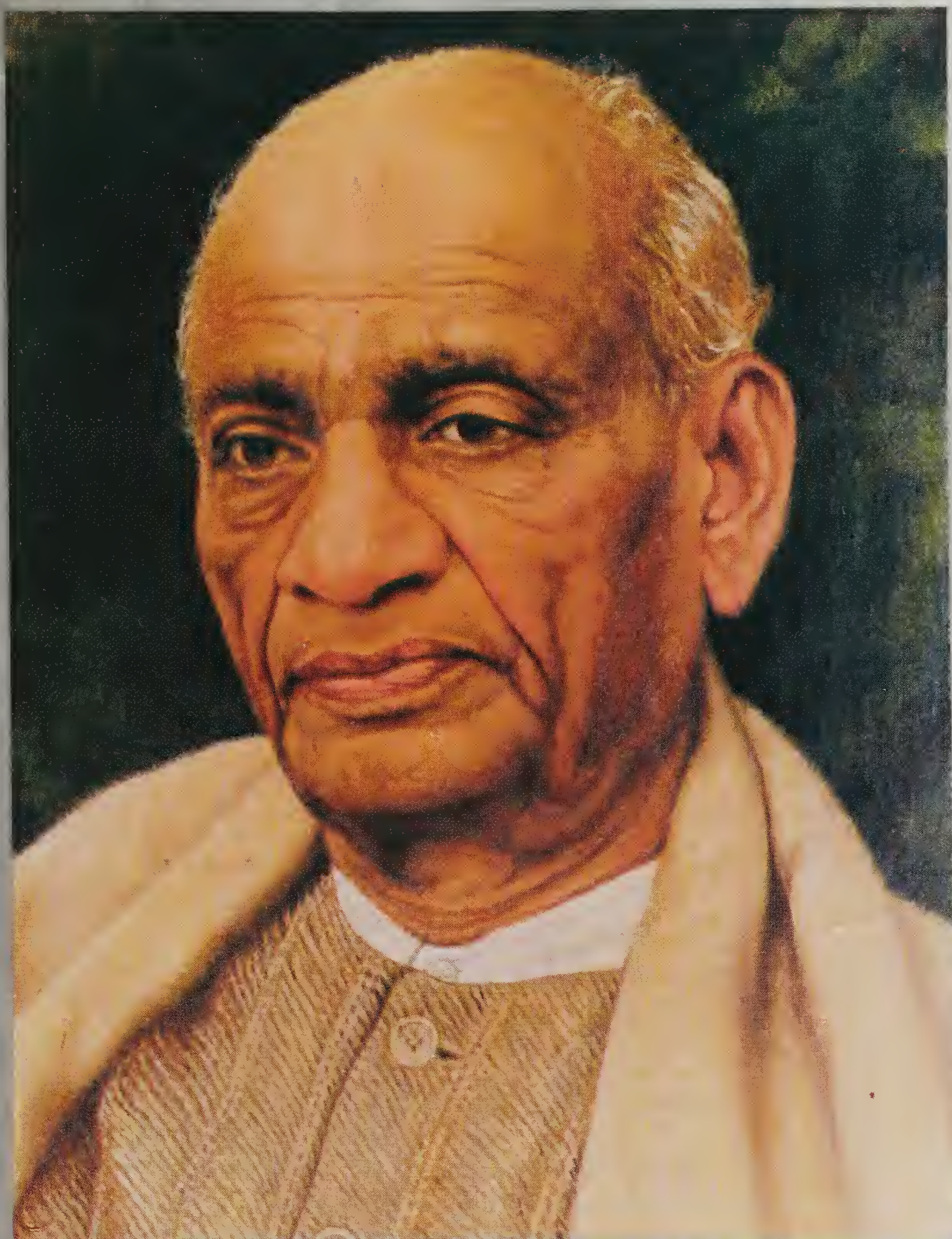


PATEL



A LIFE

by Rajmohan Gandhi

PATEL

A LIFE


tells, for the first time, the full story of the life of Vallabhbhai, the ploughboy who helped liberate India and then, in 1947-9, welded her into one nation.

Built from correspondence and diaries, including the Sardar's letters and the remarkable diary kept by his daughter Manibhen, PATEL is as authentic, intimate and complete an account as can be assembled.

"That there is today an India to think and talk about," President Rajendra Prasad wrote in May 1959, "is very largely due to Sardar Patel's statesmanship and firm administration." "Yet," added Prasad, "we are apt to ignore him."

If ignored, Sardar Patel is also missed. Troubled times engender a longing for the grip on India's affairs that Patel had. How he acquired that grip is part of PATEL's story.

A quarter-century after the selection of India's first Premier, C. Rajagopalachari recalled the event and wrote: "Undoubtedly it would have been better if Nehru had been asked to be Foreign Minister and Patel made the Prime Minister."

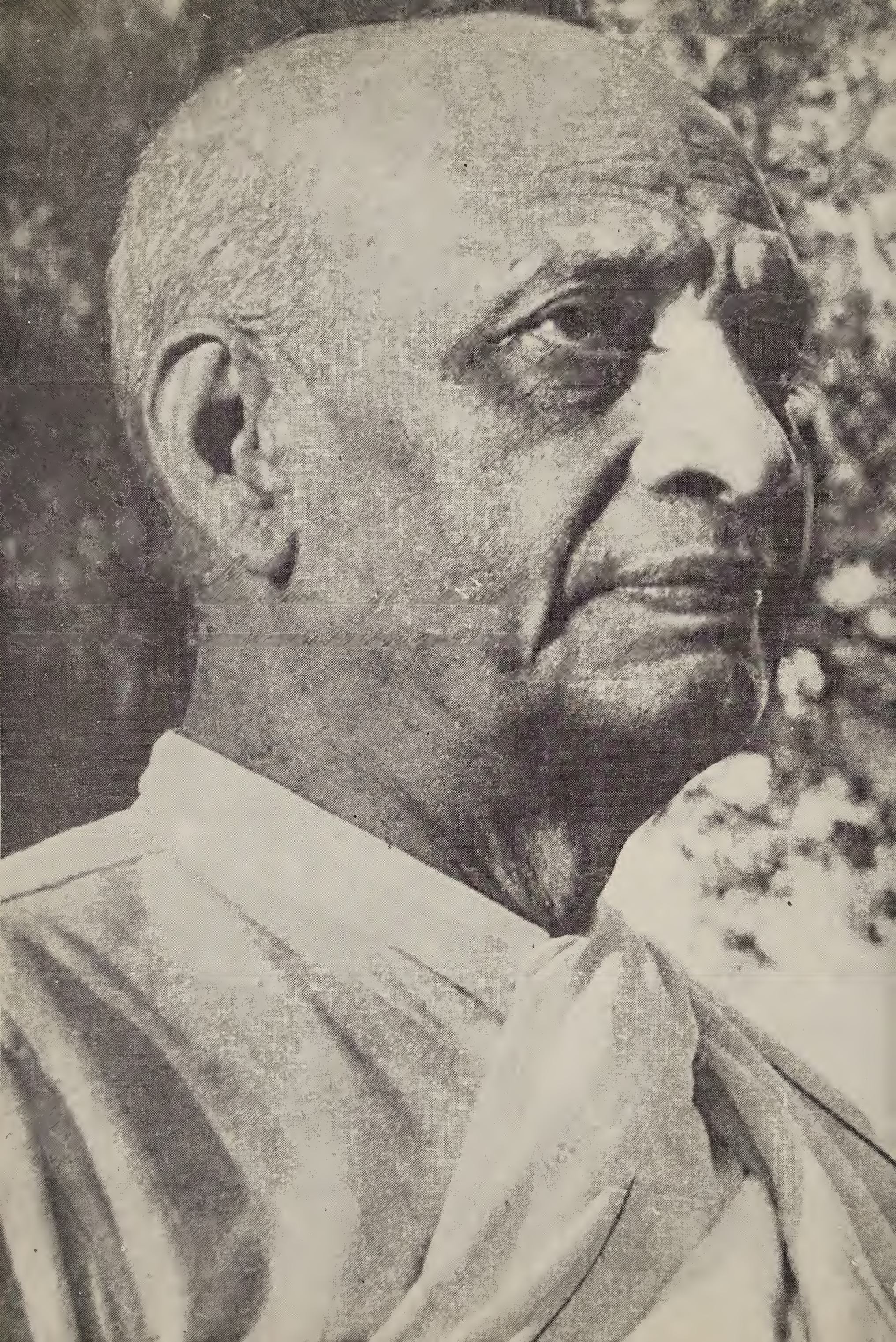


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Rajmohan Gandhi



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To U.,

wordlessly

CONTENTS

<div>PREFACE</div>	<div>SEVEN 1945-47 "VICTORY"</div>	341
<div>ONE 1875-1918 FOUND</div>	<div>EIGHT 1947-48 CLIMAX</div>	423
<div>TWO 1918-22 LIEUTENANT</div>	<div>NINE 1948-50 SOLDIER</div>	487
<div>THREE 1922-29 SARDAR</div>	<div>GLOSSARY</div>	537
<div>FOUR 1929-34 PRISONER</div>	<div>SOURCES AND BIBLIOGRAPHY</div>	539
<div>FIVE 1934-39 BOSS</div>	<div>REFERENCES AND NOTES</div>	547
<div>SIX 1939-45 THWARTED</div>	<div>INDEX</div>	603

PREFACE

THE establishment of independent India derived legitimacy and power, broadly speaking, from the exertions of three men, Gandhi, Nehru and Patel. But while its acknowledgements are fulsome in the case of Nehru and dutiful in the case of Gandhi, they are niggardly in the case of Patel. "That there is today an India to think and talk about," President Rajendra Prasad wrote in his diary on May 13, 1959, "is very largely due to Sardar Patel's statesmanship and firm administration." "Yet," added Prasad, "we are apt to ignore him."¹ Falling in 1989, the centenary of Jawaharlal's birth found expression on a thousand billboards, in commemorative TV serials, in festivals and on numerous other platforms. Occurring on October 31, 1975 – four months after Emergency had been declared –, the Patel centenary was, by contrast, wholly neglected by official India and by the rest of the Establishment, and since then the curtain drawn on the life of one of modern India's most remarkable sons has been only occasionally and partially lifted. To fling it wide and let today's generation see Vallabhbhai Patel's life is my privilege. It is not a perfect man's life and I have neither wanted nor tried to hide Patel's imperfections. But some at least may feel after knowing his life that Patel is a man to remember gratefully in good times and as a benchmark of India's potential when the times seem depressing or daunting.

Whether or not Gandhi was unjust to Patel when the moment arrived to select free India's first Premier is a question that frequently crops up. The answer disclosed by my inquiry will be found in these pages. But the opinion of some that the Mahatma had been less than fair to Vallabhbhai was a factor in my decision to attempt to write the latter's life. If a wrong had been perpetrated, some reparation from one of the Mahatma's grandsons would be in order. In addition I seek to discharge the obligation of a citizen to a founder of his nation.

I may be allowed also to refer to a personal contact, though of the slenderest kind and occurring when I was 14. Some time in 1949, during a visit that my parents, siblings and I made to 1 Aurangzeb Road – the Sardar's home in New Delhi –, I somehow found myself alone with him on his lawn. We sat in chairs facing each other and about six feet apart. He was smiling at me with his lips and his eyes – mocking and inspecting me, I thought. I felt uncomfortable and wanted to take my eyes off

him but did not – I guess my pride came in the way. Then I chanced to look more closely into his eyes and noticed affection in them. From that moment I knew that the Iron Man had a warm heart.

All the same, I have tried to be objective in this study. Grievance, reparation, obligation and affection can impart a bias but, conscious of these impulses, I have endeavoured to be honest about Vallabhbhai and fair to those with whom he came in conflict. If despite my effort bias and factual errors have crept in, I would be grateful to be shown where.

The skills and devoted toil in years gone by of Narhari Parikh, Mahadev Desai, Pyarelal, V. P. Menon and Manibehn Patel supplied much of the foundation for this work. Though younger than Patel by several years, Parikh and Desai practised law alongside him in Ahmedabad during this century's teens and became his close confidants after they and Patel had joined Gandhi. Only death – Desai's in 1942 and Patel's 1950 – could end the warmth among the three, but by then Desai had recorded several of the Sardar's sayings and doings in his diaries, in *Vir Vallabhbhai* and in *The Story of Bardoli*, and Parikh had written his *Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel*, an account of Patel's life until 1942. Pyarelal's narration of Gandhi's *Last Phase* provides much insight and information about Patel, to whom Pyarelal too was very close. Menon's *The Transfer of Power in India* and *The Story of the Integration of the Indian States* offer a ringside view of Patel's role in the epochal changes to which the titles refer, a role^o that Menon had witnessed and aided. A witness and aide from a much earlier time, Manibehn has bequeathed to historians a remarkable legacy in the form of a daily record, beginning in the mid-thirties, of her father's life. Into her diary she entered details of his health and diet and his appointments; as time passed, she also started noting down salient remarks, her father's or those of his interviewers – Manibehn was within earshot during almost all her father's interviews. Her meticulousness and perseverance enable a student to fill many a significant gap about which other accounts and papers are silent. Whatever else it may or may not have done, my effort towards understanding Patel's life has evoked in me respect, gratitude and warmth towards these painstaking and sensitive witnesses.

Next only to what I owe to these five is my debt to the (British) editors of the *Transfer of Power* volumes and the (Indian) editors of the *Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*. These man-made mines will continue to offer riches to any student of the freedom movement or of its protagonists. Patel's utterances and letters assembled in the numerous volumes edited by G. M. Nandurkar,

and the ten-volume compilation of Patel's letters edited by Durgadas have also been greatly useful to me. Individual studies, diaries or accounts have helped illuminate some periods. David Hardiman's *Peasant Nationalists of Gujarat*, a splendid account of Kheda in the twenties and early thirties, is a work I have freely drawn on; likewise Wavell's *Journal*, edited by Penderel Moon, and Vidya Shankar's *Reminiscences*. Then I have benefited from the work of S. Gopal, editor of the multi-volume *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru*, and author of the three-volume *Jawaharlal Nehru*, and used information he found or unearthed. As the references and the bibliography will reveal, I am in debt to several other authors and researchers as well.

Insight and facts also emerged from interviews. Manibehn, whose death not long before the expected publication of this study was of especial sadness to me, Bipin and Gautam Patel – the Sardar's grandsons, sons of the late Dahyabhai –, Chimanbhai Patel, the Sardar's nephew, Morarji Desai, Achyut Patwardhan, Hitendra Desai, Babubhai Patel, who among other things helped me to picture Vallabhbhai's youth, H. M. Patel, Ramnath Goenka, Minoo Masani, Narendra Nathwani, Ramkrishna Bajaj, B. P. Patel, B. R. Patel, Uttamchand Shah, Jethabhai Patel, Viren Shah, C. Subramaniam, Mulshanker Bhatt, S. Ramakrishnan, relatives of the Sardar's wife Jhaverba and the late Khushalbhai Patel, Umashankar Joshi, S. M. Joshi, C. R. Narasimhan and Gangasharan Sinha were among those who reminisced for my benefit and to whom I owe thanks.

Much of the study of old newspaper files, microfilms, private papers and published works was done at the Nehru Memorial Museum and Library in New Delhi. I am grateful for access to its material and for the several helpful tips of its deputy director, Dr. Haridev Sharma. For the opportunity to peruse files of the Government of India, I am grateful to the authorities of the National Archives.

Having asked me to write this biography, the Sardar Patel Memorial Society, Shahibag, Ahmedabad, also made its considerable material available to me. My thanks to Shri Babubhai Patel, the Society's chairman, and Shri Nathubhai Naik, its director. Of course neither the Society nor any of its office-bearers nor anyone other than myself is responsible for the opinions I have expressed. I am grateful, finally, for Navajivan, my publishers, and in particular for the care given by Shri Jitendra Desai, the managing trustee, and for the painstaking proof-reading by Shri Kanubhai Desai and Smt. Dakshabehn Madia.

New Delhi,
April 1990.

R. G.

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Between pp. 104 & 105

1. In his teens (top) and as a young pleader. 2. Barrister brothers Vithalbhai (left) and Vallabhbhai. 3. Bardoli's Sardar. 4. In the late 1920s. 5. Ladba with her sons (from left) Vithalbhai, Somabhai, Kashibhai, Narsibhai and Vallabhbhai in 1927. 6. Four key associates. Clockwise from top left, Mahadev Desai, Narhari Parikh, Mohanlal Pandya and Ravishankar Vyas. 7. Sardar, Bapu and Manibehn. 8. The June 2, 1947 meeting accepting the independence and partition of India. Clockwise after Patel are Nehru, Mountbatten, Jinnah, Liaquat Ali, Abdur Rab Nishtar, Baldev Singh and Kripalani.

Between pp. 344 & 345

9. In Kashmir, November 1947, with Bakshi Ghulam Mohammed (standing), Sheikh Abdullah and Manibehn. 10. Free India's Cabinet with C. Rajagopalachari, the first Indian Governor-General. From left, standing, N. V. Gadgil, K. C. Neogy, B. R. Ambedkar, S. P. Mookerjee, N. G. Ayyangar, Jairamdas Doulatram; seated, R. A. Kidwai, Baldev Singh, A. K. Azad, Nehru, C.R., Patel, Amrit Kaur, John Matthai and Jagjivan Ram. 11. Nizam Usman Ali Khan of Hyderabad with Patel in February 1949. 12. With his family on his birthday, October 31, 1948. From left, daughter-in-law Bhanumati (sitting), daughter Manibehn, grandson Bipin, grandson Gautam and son Dahyabhai. Standing next to Manibehn is Patel's Private Secretary V. Shankar. 13. In the garden of 1 Aurangzeb Road, New Delhi, 1949. 14. With Azad. 15. Premier Nehru, President Prasad and Deputy Premier Patel. 16. Bombay, December 15, 1950.

Pictures on Chapter title pages

Chapter One: Barrister Vallabhbhai. *Two:* Patel in 1922. *Three:* The Bardoli general. *Four:* Presiding at the 1931 Karachi Congress, with the Mahatma at his side and Jawaharlal (standing) behind. *Five:* With Sarojini Naidu, Subhas Bose and Jawaharlal. *Six:* A period group. *Seven:* With Mountbatten. *Eight:* Honoured unifier. *Nine:* On his last birthday in Ahmedabad, 31.10.50, with Manibehn, Kanjibhai Desai and Morarji Desai.

End-papers

Opening: The Patel family home in Karamsad. *Closing:* 1, Aurangzeb Road, New Delhi.

ONE
1875-1918
FOUND



HALFWAY along the 75 miles between Ahmedabad and Baroda, smack on the mapline joining the two, is the town of Nadiad. There crossed, in Mughal times, the eastward trade route from the then thriving port of Cambay on the Arabian Sea with the north-south road from the bustling city of Ahmedabad to the ports of Surat and Broach. Nadiad also served as a market for the surrounding countryside and later, after the white man's advent, as a stop on the Bombay-Ahmedabad railway opened in 1864. It was in this town of twisting streets and about 25,000 people that Vallabhbhai Patel was born, but we are not sure when. In 1897, when he sat for his matriculation exams and had to write his date of birth, Vallabh, as he confessed later, plucked a date straight out of his fancy: "31.10.75". "I have to bluff when asked how old I am," he would relate. "When I have to say it on oath, I preface the figure with 'approximately'."¹

Apparently Narsibhai, one of Vallabh's older brothers and in some ways the family's archivist, had once recorded that Vallabh was born "a month after the birth of Narayanbhai". The piece of paper with this noting in Narsibhai's handwriting also bore the date of birth of Naranbhai, who was Vallabh's cousin, a son of a maternal uncle. This piece of paper is not traceable but Narsibhai's son Shambhubhai told the author in September 1988 that he had seen it and deduced from the two notings that Vallabh was born on 1932 Samvat Vaisakh Shuddh Ravivar, which translates to 30.4.1876 or 7.5.1876².

Yet since "a month after" is not a precise period, Shambhubhai's account, which we have no cause to dispute, cannot pinpoint the true date of Vallabh's birth. Considering moreover that the Sardar's children and the country as a whole treated October 31, 1875 as the date of his birth, we will do likewise, knowing full well that it is not the true date.

His mother Ladba gave him birth in the 12' by 14' ordo – inner room or sanctum – of the house of her brother Doongerbhai Desai, who worked as a building overseer for the Nadiad municipality. Vallabh

was Ladba's fourth child and also her fourth son. Following a common custom, she had gone for the confinement from her husband's home to her folk. Ladba's husband Jhaverbhai belonged not to Nadiad but to a village called Karamsad (twelve miles south of Nadiad and three miles west of the town of Anand), where he tilled a ten-acre plot and owned a small house.

He and Ladba and all their relatives were Patidars. Centuries earlier their ancestors had migrated from the far north and taken possession of a sandy yet rich stretch of soil called the Charotar. Bordered on its east and south by the river Mahi, on its north by the river Shedhi and on the west by the black earth of the Bhal tract, the Charotar occupies a fair portion of the ground between Ahmedabad and Baroda; the two cities, however, are well outside the Charotar boundaries. The Patidar ancestors – possibly linked to the formidable Huns who swept down into India from the northwest in the sixth century or to the Gujars of Punjab or to both – cleared the Charotar woods, improved the sandy ground with dung manure and cartloads of black soil and cultivated it. They also soldiered for nearby chieftains. Revealing a mix of passion and patience, they extracted the respect of a succession of Hindu, Muslim and European rulers. More tangibly, they obtained a clear title to the lands they had occupied, and were therefore called Patidars – holders of a land-title – or Patels. A Muslim ruler assisted by the Patidars at the end of the 15th century gifted them fresh parcels of land. Later, towards the end of the Mughal era, the Patels of the Charotar helped expel a Muslim satrap from Baroda and install a Hindu ruler in his place. Multiplying with time and needing elbow room, Patels migrated over the years to east and southern Africa, Fiji, New Zealand, Britain and North America. Today Patels fill a column or more in several telephone directories outside India, but even when Vallabhbhai was born some Patels from Karamsad and elsewhere in the Charotar were living overseas.

The Patidars have alternated, in their customs, between eating meat and abstaining from it, between paying bride-price and demanding dowry from a bride's parents, between permitting widow-remarriage and banning it. When Vallabhbhai was born the pendulum had swung to abstention from meat, insistence on dowry and a ban on the remarriage of widows. While changing their customs, the Patidars retained, from one generation to the next, a code. It included loyalty to their Hindu religion, rallying together against outsiders, male supremacy, silence before elders and an individual's subservience to the (extended) family but independence before the world. Bluntness in speech, an unconcern about dress and appearance, a sense of equality within the fold that turned the village into "a collectivity of Patidar brothers" and a sense of superiority towards non-Patidars, a self-image of tough independent men...

naturally given to ruling over others” marked the Patidar character.³ A British traveller, Bishop Reginald Heber, noted in 1825 that the “Potails of Guzerat”, as he described the Patidars,

*are very inferior in dress, manners and general appearance to the Zamindars of Hindostan. Their manner, however, though less polished, is more independent; here, instead of standing with joined hands in the presence of a superior, they immediately sit down...*⁴

These ancestors of Jhaverbhai and Ladba were good but not greedy farmers. While clearing the jungle, they allowed banyan, mango, pipal, neem, babul and mhowra trees to stand unharmed around the small, carefully cultivated fields, so that “the peasants could lie in their shade at midday, cut their branches for fuel, and enjoy their fruit in the hot season”.⁵ Writing around the time of Vallabhbhai’s birth, a Briton called Alexander Forbes observed “the noble trees that everywhere abound” in the Charotar and added that “hedges and trees here swarm with birds of many varieties, from the peacock to the sparrow” and that “game of all kinds is in abundance”.⁶ Dependent almost wholly on the monsoon, which brought about 30 inches of rain in a year, the peasants of the Charotar were growing, towards the end of the 19th century, a variety of millets, grains and pulses as well as tobacco and cotton. From the mhowra flowers some of the peasants prepared the liquor daru, while a larger number made ghee from the milk of their buffaloes; Charotar ghee was known, and bought, in distant towns. In rough figures, about a fourth of the Charotar’s population were Patidars. Baraiyas and the related caste of Patanvadiyas were more numerous, but the plots they owned tended to be very small, with the result that most Baraiyas and Patanvadiyas in the Charotar worked as seasonal labourers for the Patidars. Muslims were about nine per cent, Brahmins and Rajputs four per cent each and Vaniyas (or Banias) three per cent.

Proud of their blood and soil but tempering their pride with realism, the Patidars were prouder if they belonged to the Chhagam (“Six Settlements”) group of villages and towns. Jhaverbhai’s Karamsad and Ladba’s Nadiad were two of the six; the other four settlements in this elect category were Vaso, Sojitra, Dharmaj and Bhadran. While fair distances separated some of the six from one another, four of the Chhagam – Bhadran, Dharmaj, Sojitra and Vaso – were not even under direct British rule; they belonged to the Bhadran and Petlad talukas of the princely State of Baroda. Even so it became de rigueur for the Patidars of the Chhagam to marry within the Six Settlements circle, or the Chhagam gol, as it was and is called, but outside their village or town. Hence it was that Jhaverbhai of Karamsad, a Patidar-dominated

village with a population of about 2,500 people in 1875, had married Ladba of Nadiad, where about a quarter of the inhabitants were Patidars.

Both Nadiad and Karamsad belonged to the district of Kheda (spelt Kaira at the time), one of the Gujarati-speaking districts of the British Raj's Bombay presidency. While Nadiad town was the headquarters of Kheda's Nadiad taluka, Karamsad lay next to Anand town in Anand taluka. One of the sons of Jhaverbhai and Ladba, Vallabh's older brother Vithal, was before long married to a girl from Sojitra, as were numerous other Patidar boys from Nadiad and Karamsad. We will see in due course that political consequences flowed from these bonds of the Charotar Patidars across the British India/princely India divide, and from the geographical interlocking of bits and pieces of princely India with pieces and bits of British India. Here we will merely note that the Charotar extended into princely India and that it comprised the most fertile, and most densely populated, region of Kheda district, which, however, was larger than the Charotar tract.

Jhaverbhai's house in Karamsad, to which Ladba returned with the infant Vallabh, was two-storeyed and not unlike the Nadiad house of his brother-in-law Doongerbhai. The ground-floor consisted of the raveshi (verandah), which had a hichko (swing or jhoola) on which Jhaverbhai or a guest could rock himself while smoking a hookah, a parsar (sitting room), an ordo (sanctum or private room) where valuables were kept, and where he and Ladba slept – the others sleeping in the parsar and raveshi –, and a rasodu (kitchen), where the women cooked and every one ate, water (brought from a well nearby) and firewood were stored and the family took their baths. Harvested crops were kept in the upper storey which could also be used for sleeping. The roof was made of tiles baked in the village, the walls of brick and lime and the floors of stone or earth layered with gobar (animal dung). One side of the house, not its front, faced the street and on it were painted, in botanical dye, tigers, peacocks, a scene from the Mahabharata and another of mounted Indian soldiers facing Europeans. The house was entered by climbing some steps and turning right into the raveshi. To the steps' right, a pair of tiny doors in the sidewall led to two small basement rooms which were let out. A Muslim grocer called Karim Mian rented them after Jhaverbhai's death, while Vallabhbhai was living; Karim Mian used one room as a shop and lived with his family in the other. Karamsad's residents, joined by others proud and fond of Vallabhbhai's memory, have preserved Jhaverbhai's house; they have also extended and altered it, so that it is not quite the place that Vallabh knew as a child and a boy.

There is a story that Vallabh's father left home in 1857 to join the anti-British forces of Rani Laxmi of Jhansi but was taken prisoner en route by Malharrao Holkar, ruler of Indore. In the story

Jhaverbhai, bound hand and foot, earns Holkar's admiration and his own liberty by suggesting winning moves to the prince at a game of chess that he was allowed to watch. Jhaverbhai then returns to his village, sires his children and tells Vallabh – "while tilling the fields" – all about his adventure and also about the vanity, self-indulgence and quarrels of India's chieftains, which invited slavery. The romantic story appears in many a book on the Sardar but never with evidence of its veracity. Narhari Parikh, one of Patel's close friends and his first biographer, gives only a short paragraph to it, prefaced with "It is said that".⁷ The story is unlikely to be true, for it has also been related, in identical or similar terms, about other persons. If there had been truth in it, Vallabhbhai would in all probability have recalled it during his dealings in 1947-50 with Indore and Holkar's throne.

Vallabh may or may not have learned nationalism or chess from his father but he unquestionably inherited a conspicuous habit of Jhaverbhai's, which was to pace up and down while thinking about a problem, or even when there was no problem to think about. Jhaverbhai paced thus in the courtyard of his modest Karamsad house; later, after the Swaminarayan sect, stressing devotion to God and detachment from the world, had captured Jhaverbhai heart and soul, he paced up and down in Karamsad's Swaminarayan temple. Years later his son would do the same in his home in Godhra, Borsad, Ahmedabad, Bardoli or New Delhi and even on small balconies in flats in Bombay. Somabhai, Narsibhai and Vithalbhai – Soma, Narsi and Vithal – had been born before Vallabh; he was followed by another boy, Kashi, and then by their parents' only girl and last child, Dahi or Dahiba. Since Vallabh's cousins and others in Karamsad called Jhaverbhai "Motakaka", which meant father's elder (or eldest) brother, Vallabh and his brothers and sister also called him "Motakaka", not "Bapu" (Father). Though he had his ten acres and his house, Motakaka had been impoverished by debts and the lives of Ladba and her children were marked by hardship.

Copying Motakaka, young Vallabh kept two 24-hour fasts a month, when he abstained from water as well. He was wiry and tough. He had to be tough, for he was a middle brother, remembered last when clothes or sweets were to be shared and thought of at once when a chore needed doing. Parental hopes were centred (as Vallabh would later relate⁸) on Soma and Narsi, the eldest two, and parental affection on Kashi and Dahi. Not that the mother of the six, "the gentle and friendly"⁹ Ladba, 18 years younger than Jhaverbhai, had time to spare for any of them; in addition to her husband and children she usually had guests to look after and neighbours she wanted to help. Vallabh occasionally went with his father to the temple and, more often, helped him on the land – of labour the middle brother was

allowed a handsome share. The boy, we are told, learnt to plough straight and deep, to sow without leaving a bare patch and care for cattle. While in the fields Father would also teach Vallabh arithmetic tables, but ere long Jhaverbhai became a recluse, spending all his time in the temple and coming home only for the midday meal. Deprived of adequate parental love¹⁰, Vallabh was, in addition, ordered about by Soma, Narsi and Vithal. When Vallabh hit back, the older brothers called him a "mad bull".¹¹ While Vithal was sent to school at the age of five, Vallabh, two years younger, was kept at home until he was seven or eight¹². He saw early that the world was neither just nor fair.

Karamsad was proud of its unassuming headmaster Kahandas Patel, better known as Kahandas Master. "Shrewd", "gentle yet strict" and "public-spirited",¹³ he ran the village's primary school where boys learnt Gujarati and arithmetic in Gujarati. (The low building with its sloping roof can still be seen in Karamsad, behind the neem trees that began life before Vallabh.) Other teachers were different. When, at the age of ten or so, Vallabh asked one of them a question, the teacher spat out an abuse in reply and added, "Why do you ask me? Learn for yourself." Thereupon Vallabh made a bitter decision to learn for himself.¹⁴ At 14 he insisted on joining an English school that had just opened in Karamsad, where he sought out books and ignored the teachers.

By the time he had completed the English school's three standards Vallabh was close to 17. Vithal had been married when he was nine; his bride Diwaliba came – as we noted earlier – from the Chhagam village of Sojitra.¹⁵ Vallabh must have been 17 or so at his own wedding. Jhaverba, the bride Vallabh's parents, uncles and aunts had chosen for him, was 12 or 13. We know very little about her beyond the fact that she came from Gana, a village three miles from Karamsad but, interestingly enough, not one of the Six Settlements. Jhaverba died in January 1909 when she was 29 or so, her husband 33 and their two children 5 and 3. He seldom talked about her.

"Was your mother pretty?" Vallabhbhai's daughter Manibehn was asked in July 1987. "I have no idea," the 83-year-old lady replied. "What can you say about her?" "Nothing." "Did your father ever talk about her?" "My father didn't talk to me about anything. In the morning he would ask me how I was, that's all." "Was your mother light-skinned or dark-skinned?" "I don't know."¹⁶

The conspicuous silence of official India about Vallabhbhai is sadly paralleled by a silence, no doubt unintentional, about Jhaverba in the several books and commemorative volumes that feature her illustrious husband. These do not even provide the names of Jhaverba's parents, and only one or two mention her village. A journey from Karamsad to Gana in September 1987 yielded some scraps of information. The route must have been traversed several times by Vallabhbhai, and

trudged oftener by Jhaverba, at times accompanied by two small children. The 1987 journey – 95 or 96 years after the Vallabh-Jhaverba wedding – was very quickly and easily made, and at once revealed all the difference between a Chhagam village and one outside the privileged gol, between prosperity and squalor, between fame and its lack. Not that the people of Gana are unaware of their place in the Sardar's story. The world may not know of its existence, but Gana's residents can promptly lead a visitor to the house of Jhaverba's parents and indeed to the very room and floor where, almost a century ago, the boy Vallabh, his parents, brothers, sister, brothers' wives and other relatives spent a week or so in the wedding's ceremonies and festivities. One of the Gana guides pointed to a man resting on a bed in the room and said, "He is a descendant of Sardar Patel's in-laws." The man got up and disclosed his name: "Raojibhai Patel."

"Jhaverba," said Raojibhai in answer to a question, "was the sister of Motibhai, who was the father of my father Chaturbhai." "What was the name of Jhaverba's, and your grandfather Motibhai's, father?" "Desaibhai Punjabhai Patel." "What did he do?" "He was a farmer." "What was Jhaverba's mother's name?" Raojibhai, who seemed in his late fifties, scratched his head and said he did not know.

"Did you hear anything about Jhaverba from your father or grandfather?" Raojibhai thought for a while and shook his head. "Please try to remember. Did you hear any comment about her looks or nature? Was she tall or short, dark or fair, beautiful or plain, kind or short-tempered?" The Raojibhai head was scratched again, and once more it shook in ignorance. Presently his older brother Gordhanbhai turned up; someone had informed him of the arrival of curious visitors.

"Gordhanbhai, I am trying to find out about Jhaverba, your father's aunt and the Sardar's wife. Did you hear anything about her? How tall or short was she? And what were her looks?" Gordhanbhai was thoughtful. Then he slowly lifted his right hand. "She was this high," he said. "Short, on the whole." "How do you know?" "This is what I remember hearing." "And her looks?" Thoughtfulness once again. Then Gordhanbhai said, "She was light-skinned, and nice-looking. That is what I heard." His account may be true, for while Vallabhbhai and his son Dahyabhai were, in relative terms, dark-skinned and tall, Manibehn is not. "And her nature?" "She was supposed to be gentle."

Why was a Chhagam girl not chosen for Vallabh? It is probable that in his straitened circumstances Vallabh's father preferred dowry to status, and that Jhaverba's father Desaibhai Punjabhai was willing to cough up to secure an alliance with a Chhagam village.¹⁷ Be that as it may. Little Jhaverba stayed in her parents' home in Gana after her marriage, and Vallabh went to the small Baroda-territory town of Petlad, seven miles from Karamsad, where a school taught English up

to the fifth standard. Six other Karamsad boys joined him. They lived in a small house, sharing the cooking, scrubbing and rent. Every weekend they walked to Karamsad, collected provisions for the coming week and returned to Petlad. Vallabh was their leader. Visiting the lodging-house, his father was impressed with its cleanliness. On a wall a slogan was scrawled, "Unity is Strength!"¹⁸

During one weekend the boys plodding between Petlad and Karamsad noticed that Vallabh had left their ranks. Looking back, they saw his bent figure: he was pulling out a piece of rock blocking the narrow path across the fields. But at Nadiad High School, where Vallabh studied after his Petlad spell, he was called "stormy" and an "outlaw".¹⁹ The practical jokes of Vithal, who passed his matric in 1891 – six years before Vallabh crossed that barrier –, were not emulated by Vallabh, who could not have written, as Vithal once did,

*a postcard in his own hand, but under another name, intimating to his neighbour that his son-in-law was dead. On receipt of these tidings the girl-wife was obliged to break her bangles forthwith, as a mark of widowhood. When the relatives of the girl went to the son-in-law's home for the performance of the obsequies, they found to their welcome surprise that some one had merely played a cruel hoax on them all.*²⁰

The style of Vallabh, who lived at Nadiad in Uncle Doongerbhai's house, was different. When a teacher, a Mr. Agarwala, did not turn up on time for his class, one of Vallabh's classmates launched into a song. The others joined in. Hearing the sounds, Mr. Agarwala, who had been chatting with a colleague, marched in and berated the song-leader. After listening for a while Vallabh stood up and said: "Why are you scolding him? We sang because you did not come on time. Would you have liked us to cry?" Ordered by Mr. Agarwala to leave the room, Vallabh collected his books, threw a glance at the class, and walked out. The others followed him. Mr. Agarwala then went to the headmaster, a Mr. Bharucha, who asked Vallabh to apologize. "Sir," said Vallabh, "you are asking the wrong person to apologize. What did we do after waiting for some time? Did we create a racket? We merely sang." Mr. Agarwala had to take the class without receiving an apology.²¹

Another teacher had to cease his illicit selling of notebooks and pencils to the boys after Vallabh organized a boycott. Helped by Vallabh and his friends, a third teacher won a place in the Nadiad municipal committee, defeating a rich opponent, belonging to an influential Patidar family, who had rashly declared that he would shave off his moustache if he lost. Soon a barber and about fifty students, led by Vallabh, arrived at the defeated candidate's

residence, and obliged him to keep his word.²² Vallabh's Nadiad venture was interrupted by a brief spell in the Government High School in Baroda, where he lived in a hostel attached to a temple. A dispute occurred in the Baroda school as well. Having to choose between Sanskrit and additional Gujarati, Vallabh had selected the latter, taught by a Chhotalal Master. Finding Vallabh in his class, Chhotalal Master said:

Welcome, sir. You have given up Sanskrit for Gujarati, but do you know that one who is poor in Sanskrit can never be good in Gujarati? Every Hindu student in this country should learn Sanskrit.

Chhotalal Master had meant well, but Vallabh did not relish the sermon. He replied: "Sir, you would have been sitting home if all the students had taken Sanskrit." The logic was flawless. But Vallabh had been impudent. Chhotalal Master asked him to stand on his bench. Vallabh obeyed. Chhotalal Master next asked him to write tables one to ten and bring them to school the following day. This time Vallabh did not obey. "You will write tables one to ten, twice!" Chhotalal Master shouted the next day. Vallabh did not write them; the teacher again increased the punishment; Vallabh was stubborn; and so it went on until he was ordered to write two hundred tables. They were not written, and Chhotalal Master sent Vallabh to the principal, a Mr. Narvane, for "appropriate action". Vallabh offered the following defence:

Sir, I accepted without demur the punishment given to me for rudeness, and stood on the bench. But this extra punishment, when I had committed no new wrong, was unjust. Besides, I am a student of the sixth standard. It is an insult to me if I am asked to write tables, which is what boys of six or seven are asked to do. There would have been meaning in being asked to write passages from the day's lesson. But tables! Surely the teacher only meant to insult and humiliate me.

Mr Narvane's reaction to this has not been recorded but he threatened Vallabh with dismissal over another incident. Finding the mathematics teacher stuck in the middle of a problem in algebra, Vallabh blurted out, "Sir, you do not know how to do it." "Do it yourself and be the teacher," the piqued master replied. Vallabh solved the sum – and sat in the teacher's chair! His explanation that he was only acting as instructed was not accepted by Narvane, who told Vallabh that he would be asked to leave if he didn't behave. Vallabh walked out at once and returned to Nadiad.²³

These incidents show why, when he looked back, Vallabhbhai the statesman spoke of his "captaincy of mischief";²⁴ but, taken along with the bent figure on the path to Petlad, they also show that young Vallabh, 19 or 20 at the time, was responsible, blunt, rude, intrepid and unsparing, a natural leader, attracted to justice, skilful in debate and aware of his adversary's weak point. Inspired verses or phrases did not flow from Vallabh's lips. His voice, as he became a young adult, was pleasant and turning rich but it was not golden, and he did not sing. His fingers produced no work of art. He did not find it hard to memorize passages from English books, and used them while making a few speeches in English, which his schoolmates would afterwards recall, for young men giving speeches in English were rare in the Six Settlements. Yet no longing to write, whether in English or Gujarati, gripped him, and even his reading did not extend beyond what was necessary for practical purposes.²⁵

He could store in his mind the earthy sayings of peasants and recall them at will, yet though he spoke effectively at debates in his Nadiad school he had no gift for spellbinding eloquence. He had a flair for punning. In that clash in Baroda, Chhotalal Master had asked, "So, sir, have you brought the two hundred tables?" Speaking in Gujarati, the teacher had correctly used the expression "two hundred padas", but "padas" meant "bull buffaloes" as well, and Vallabh instantly replied, "Sir, I did bring two hundred padas, but two of them were rogues. They turned wild at the school gate and turned round and scared away the rest of the padas as well. That is why they are not here."²⁶ However, revealing will more than talent, his youth was a time when Destiny was forging a character rather than fashioning a personality.

* * *

Soma and Narsi had discontinued studying and were taking care of the Karamsad land and the homestead. Vithal, having completed his matric in Nadiad, had gone to Bombay in 1891, to study law. Unable to join the Law College – the family did not have the means –, he read on his own and attended the privately-conducted Gokhale law classes. In 1895 he passed the district pleaders' examination and started practice in Godhra. Vallabh passed his matric in Nadiad in 1897, when he was nearly 22, having taken three rather than two years to clear his sixth and seventh standard courses. Failure in an arithmetic exam had obliged him to repeat a year. If it ever reached him, word of Vallabh's difficulty with arithmetic should have produced a smile on Chhotalal Master's face.

Kahandas Master of Karamsad and Uncle Doongerbhai in Nadiad urged him to become a teacher; they probably didn't know what he

thought of teachers, and they certainly didn't know their Vallabh. Doongerbhai, the municipal overseer, in fact thought Vallabh to be "no good at studies". As Vallabhbhai would later recall, "With a view to my welfare, he offered me the post of mukaddam so that I would begin to earn my livelihood at once."²⁷ The youth, however, had been "turning over ambitious projects in his mind ever since his childhood."²⁸

Having learned that fame and wealth came early to barristers educated in England, Vallabh drew up a sober, secret plan for joining their ranks. He would become a simple lawyer first and save money for his goal. He would not attempt an LL B course, which meant six years in college, an unaffordable outlay of time and money. He would learn by himself. He would study at his uncle's home and elsewhere in Nadiad with the help of books that local lawyers might lend, and take the district pleaders' examination. Vithal's moves had followed a similar design, except that he was able to go to Bombay for his studies. Yet neither brother knew that England was in the other's dreams.²⁹ Working rigorously to plan in Nadiad, and poring over borrowed books, Vallabh passed the pleaders' test in three years. Vithal had taken four years to do so. Vithalbhai's biographer writes:

Even when in Bombay, Vithalbhai went off and on to Karamsad to see his mother....He was hardly in affluent circumstances, and yet he not infrequently travelled by the upper classes in the railway, and brought very costly gifts from Bombay for his Karamsad friends and relatives.... He had his quota of practical jokes. Coming to Karamsad after a comparatively long absence, he often made himself unrecognisable by the younger folk of the place, and roamed about the village asking every passer-by where exactly Jhaverbhai Patel's house was, and the joke continued until he was discovered.³⁰

The difference between the brothers, and England's pull, are both conveyed by Vallabhbhai's words, uttered after he had realized his goal:

I longed to go overseas to see the people of England who, living 7,000 miles away, were able to rule us for so long. My father... had no means to enable me to fulfil my ambitions. I was told that only if I could get 7 to 10,000 rupees I would be able to proceed to England.... I therefore studied very earnestly for my law examination and resolved firmly to save sufficient money for a visit to England.³¹

The oft-quoted incident of Vallabh grabbing a red-hot poker and searing a boil in his armpit took place shortly before he wrote his

pleaders' test, when he was about 25, not when he was a boy. The impression that the incident occurred "during his school-life"³² is incorrect. What happened was as follows. Needing a quiet place to prepare themselves for the pleaders' test, Vallabh and two friends of his, Kashibhai Desai and Chhotabhai, had gone from Nadiad to the Baroda-territory village of Bakrol, not far from Karamsad, where Kashibhai's relatives lived in Desai's Haveli, built in 1772. Vallabh developed a boil in his armpit while living and studying for some weeks in a peaceful second-floor room in this Haveli. Bakrol's barber, to whom the village turned for removing teeth or puncturing boils, was summoned. The barber, whose name was Madha Rat, brought his iron poker which he made red-hot in a fire in the Haveli, but he shrank from taking it to Vallabh's boil. Rebuking Madha Rat, Vallabh picked up the poker and scorched the boil himself. The story of the incident, including the name and shame of Madha Rat, was handed down to succeeding generations in the Haveli, where the room Vallabh occupied, reached by a dark steep narrow staircase, is preserved as a memorial.

Visiting the Bakrol Haveli 42 years later – in March 1942 – Vallabhbhai would put two questions to Kashibhai's bhabhi (sister-in-law) Diwaliba, whom he had met in the year 1900: "Where is Amu Mian?" "Where is Lakshmi Ram?" Amu Mian was a Muslim servant in the Haveli in the year of the pleaders' test, and Lakshmi Ram was its maharaj (cook). A picture of the 1942 visit hangs on a wall in the Haveli. It shows Diwaliba Desai standing near Vallabhbhai. It is not hard, looking at this picture, to let the imagination travel to the year 1900, and to recreate mental scenes of a 25-year-old Vallabh ascending the Haveli's dark steps, bending over books beside a kerosene lamp, delivering Lakshmi Ram's dishes past his moustache and into his mouth, handing Amu Mian his washing – and snatching the poker from Madha Rat's hesitant hand.³³

Other scenes, a shade older than the ones we have just left and enacted in the Nadiad home of his friend Kashibhai, where Vallabh spent many months studying for the pleaders' test, reveal a wholly different facet. Kashibhai's father had died, and a friend of the father's was looking after Kashi and Vallabh. This man's wife dies, leaving a boy of six months. Vallabh takes over the infant's care. He sleeps beside him, feeds him milk, washes his nappies....³⁴

He was 25 when he passed the pleaders' test. In Petlad and Nadiad his dress had consisted of a cap with some Zari in it and a full-sleeve shirt (loose and buttonless at the wrists) hanging over knee-length shorts. Now he would wear a lawyer's black coat or a khes (cotton shawl) over a kameez and dhoti and don a red Patidar pagdi. Having "played cheerfully"³⁵ as a student – gilli danda, hututu, kho, gedi dada

and vaans peepuli* were probably his games – he had stayed lean. His height was 5' 5 1/2" (1m.66cm.) and his complexion dark. The crop on his head had started to recede early, enlarging his prominent forehead. Like most Chhagam men he had kept a moustache, his being droopy and not particularly thick. (Vithal, a trace shorter than Vallabh, was also losing the hair on his head, but he sported a beard as well as a moustache.) Possessing a strong chin and broad nostrils, Vallabh looked more becoming in profile than in the face." Good-looking or not, his face – grave, rarely smiling and lit by piercing eyes – was capable, even at the beginning of his career as a pleader, of engendering nervousness in the onlooker.

After three lively years in Godhra in the Panchmahals district, a dusty town 66 miles northeast of Nadiad, Vithal had moved, in 1898, to the town of Borsad, which was nearer home and belonged to the Charotar. He invited his younger brother to join him as a partner, but, having learned by himself, Vallabh wished also to work for himself. He decided to try his luck in Godhra. Fetching Jhaverba – we do not know whether she was with Vallabhbhai's parents at Karamsad or at her parents' place in Gana –, he borrowed money from an unidentified friend, arrived in Godhra, rented a house, bought – at an auction – a table, a few chairs, some bolsters and some square yards of rough matting and launched his career. And he and Jhaverba, married some eight or nine years earlier, finally commenced their joint journey.

Of the wonder, charm and other joys of this their first essay in companionship, or of the tiffs, tempers and tears that may have followed in their wake, we know absolutely nothing. Their times and customs, fortified by Vallabhbhai's reserve, ruled out any mention to a third party of a couple's happiness in each other, or of a man's feeling for his young wife, or, unless they had crossed a boundary, of moments that cloud domestic felicity. Yet we do know that the two were in the very bloom of their lives, Vallabh twenty-five and striding towards the world, and Jhaverba a young woman of twenty. It is said that she was not literate, but that fact, assuming that it be a fact, could hardly have robbed the twain of their thrill at being together at last.

Within a few months, however, they faced an ugly threat: plague. A letter Vallabhbhai wrote to Narsibhai – Narsi was brother number two, older than Vithal but younger than Soma – speaks of the plague, of the plague's repercussions on Vallabhbhai's work, and of his concern for the folk at Karamsad. Though it refers to Kashi, Vallabh's younger brother, whom Vallabh has evidently taken

* See the glossary at the end of this book.

** About half a century later, the editor of *The Statesman*, Ian Stephens, would call Patel "exceptionally handsome in profile".³⁸

under his wing, it is wholly silent about Jhaverba. Containing a greeting for his father, it has no message for mother Ladba. In what it says and excludes, it is a report on the period.

16.3.1901: *Respected Narsibhai, The plague is on the increase here. There are ten cases a day and a lot of rats die. Work in the court has stopped and is unlikely to resume for another two or three months. For the moment, therefore, I am living on what's in the house, but let that not worry you....*

Night and day I think of how to assist you. Just now I am helpless, but you will be able to count on me when my situation improves. If the plague spreads, I will send Kashibhai to Karamsad.

Keep sending good news from there. Remember me to respected father. Let me know if there's something to be done. Obeisances from Vallabhbhai.³⁷

The plague did spread. A friend of Vallabh's called Ramjibhai, a bachelor living alone, became a victim. Vallabh moved to his house and nursed him, but to no avail. On his return from the funeral, Vallabhbhai saw that he, too, had caught the fell disease. Terrifying thoughts must have haunted him but he remained calm and took practical steps. First, to give her safety, he sent Jhaverba to Karamsad, probably with Kashibhai. She was reluctant to leave his side,³⁸ but had to yield. Then Vallabh took himself to Nadiad, where, mercifully, he fully recovered. According to one version, he stayed alone in Nadiad in a dilapidated temple.³⁹

His climb in Godhra, once the plague was over and he and Jhaverba were back, was rapid. To make money, he only accepted criminal cases, which in those days were rapidly disposed of. He inherited Vithal's contacts and also the after-effects of some of his brother's frolics. A young graduate whom we only know as Mr. J., apparently desperate to "get his due from an unappreciative world", had been told by Vithal that the Dewan of a certain Central India State had called on him, and that he, Vithal, had recommended J.'s name to the Dewan for a high post in that State. Vithal also arranged the receipt by J. of a telegram "intimating his appointment to the post referred to". Young J., Vithalbhai's biographer goes on to say,

advertised his according-to-him-well-deserved appointment all over the little town, and made all the necessary and more-than-necessary preparations for leaving the place. Farewell parties were arranged, and the hero actually left his home for the station, where another telegram was placed in his hands,

intimating postponement...It was a long time after the event that young J. came to know that the whole thing was a big hoax.

Remembering the injury done to him, J., who became a lawyer himself, did not, it would seem, "lose a single opportunity to harass" Vithal's brother, the tormentor himself having moved on to Borsad. "Needless to say," Vithalbhai's biographer records, "that no real harm could be done to Vallabhbhai, who soon outshone J."⁴⁰ Vallabhbhai could be frisky himself. Narandas Vaidya, a client who had the young pleader stay in his house in Dahod, another town in the Panchmahals, would remind Vallabhbhai 46 years later: "In your boisterous mood [you] gave my hand a sting of burning cigar and that mark is still imprinted."⁴¹

Vithal sent a message. A powerful Borsad trio – the resident magistrate, a sub-judge and the Mamlatdar (head of the taluka) – were planning to punish him (Vithal) because he had demanded an enquiry into the conduct of a friend of the trio, a former sub-judge: could Vallabh not move to Borsad? He would. He and Jhaverba shifted. But they lived separately from Vithal. Indeed, Vallabh so conducted himself "that all the officers thought that the two brothers were not on friendly terms". His practice thriving, Vallabh bided for the moment when the trio might need his help. It came quite soon. The Mamlatdar was implicated in some proceeding, and his friend the resident magistrate sought Vallabh's assistance. "Are you sure you want me to help you?" asked Vallabh. "Yes, I am quite sure," said the magistrate. "You want Vithalbhai's brother to help you?" "Well, yes," replied the magistrate. "All right," said Vallabh, "I will, if Vithalbhai asks me to." Eating crow, the trio sent an olive branch to Vithal, who duly asked his brother to help the Mamlatdar.⁴²

"The redoubtable pair," writes Vithalbhai's biographer, referring to the brothers in Borsad, "was not infrequently engaged by the opposing parties." Vithalbhai's assets, as spelt out by his admiring biographer, were his "legal acumen, superb exposition and, above all, his searching cross-examination".⁴³ Obtaining facts about Vallabh's time in Borsad from contemporaries, Parikh, himself a lawyer, concluded that "the qualities which most assisted Vallabhbhai were his commonsense (and) his understanding of human nature".⁴⁴ While Vithal's "personal relations with prominent people were cordial and his influence with the police was immense",⁴⁵ his brother "kept away from police officers and magistrates" – except when he found it necessary, in open court, to tackle their "insulting and intimidating behaviour towards lawyers".⁴⁶

Since the taluka of Borsad led Bombay presidency in crime, the Raj had posted a resident magistrate in Borsad town to try serious

offences. For important trials the government pleader came down from Ahmedabad. "In almost all such cases," writes Parikh, "Vallabhbhai used to be engaged for the defence." And it would seem that almost always he obtained acquittals. To get round him, the government pleader from Ahmedabad and Borsad's police officers urged Bombay to transfer the resident magistrate's court from Borsad to Anand, pointing out, plausibly, that Anand was a railway junction, whereas Borsad was not. Their plea was accepted, and the resident magistrate moved to Anand. But so did Vallabh! To be precise, he moved to the Karamsad homestead, which virtually adjoined Anand. In less than a year, the court was transferred back to Borsad, junction or no junction.⁴⁷

He was continuing on occasion to captain "mischief". Charged – justly, it would seem – with stealing railway property, a railway employee who had engaged Vallabhbhai said to him, "My boss tells me that if I let him know of any previous imprisonment, he might obtain my acquittal or at least a reduction in sentence." Perceiving at once that the intention of his client's boss was to hurt and not help his client, Vallabh decided to give the boss, and himself, some amusement.

"Do you have proof of your date of birth?" he asked his client. "Yes, sir, my mother has it." "Bring it to me," said Vallabh. The accused brought it. Vallabh then drafted an application, which the accused signed, beseeching clemency on the ground that he had been imprisoned earlier for nine months, and giving the dates of his imprisonment (date of birth less nine months) and of his release (date of birth). Though the employee had seen the joke and was willing to play along, the poor boss didn't comprehend it. Gratified with the employee's "confession" and overlooking the implausibility of the dates, the boss handed the "confession" to the prosecuting lawyer, who, in court, confronted the accused with the piece of paper. "Yes, it is my application," the employee said. Then Vallabh examined his client.

Patel: Did you give this application to your boss? Accused: Yes. P.: Why did you give it? A.: He had assured me that I would be discharged if I admitted an earlier imprisonment. P.: What was the offence for which you were punished? A.: I was punished the way everyone is punished. P.: What do you mean, everyone? A.: You, my boss, the magistrate, all have been punished that way. Every man has been imprisoned in his mother's womb for nine months.

Vithal would have been proud. And envious. But Vallabh was not satisfied with amusement, or with the discomfiture of the

opposite side. Counter-attacking with vigour, he obtained his client's acquittal.⁴⁸

A handful of officials and judges and another handful of lawyers, led by the young Patel brothers, formed Borsad's elite. The town of shapeless streets, no industry and about 10,000 souls was dreary. "There was nothing like social or public life there, neither were there any places of amusement."⁴⁹ Vallabhbhai's day was spent either in the courts or within the four corners of his house, which included his "office". Retaining the ploughboy's practice, he was up at 5 a.m. Clients dropped in early and usually found him seated in an easy chair in the "office", smoking a hookah. He, Vithalbhai and a few friends would spend some evenings together after dinner (like his parents he abstained from meat, as did Jhaverba), sharing news or gossip or playing a game of bridge. Earning and putting by to plan, he soon had two additional, and also joyful, reasons for working hard: Mani, his and Jhaverba's first child, a girl, was born in April 1904, and their boy Dahya came in November 1905. Both births took place in Gana.

Karamsad was only about ten miles north. Though Vallabh didn't often make the bullock-cart journey to the homestead, he aided it. Vithal was less responsible. According to Vithal's biographer, the father, "a man of few words", seeing that "Vithalbhai was doing very well" but neglecting Karamsad, announced that "he would not step into Vithalbhai's house at Borsad until and unless Vithalbhai discharged his obligations to the family".⁵⁰ The younger lawyer was more conscious of the difficulties at the homestead.

Vallabhbhai to Narsibhai, 14.1.1904: *I have sent instructions that the money along with interest should be paid to Naranbhai. You are not to worry any more about this...It does not become you to consider pawning sister's jewellery.*

As I see it, your debt is our debt. If you let me know the details of how much you owe, and to whom, I will free you of the burden.

Why has Kashibhai left Nadiad and joined you at Karamsad? Our thought is to send him to Bombay (for further studies). Please send him here.

If respected Somabhai's fever hasn't come down, let him come here. Medicines etc. can be arranged here. Even if the fever has come down he can recuperate here. Do send him here. Kindly write what's to be done. That's all. Your servant, Vallabhbhai.⁵¹

"An elderly gentleman of good physique", father Jhaverbhai, walking erect and clad in white, called at Vallabh's Borsad house one morning. Vallabhbhai, 30 at the time, immediately put aside his hookah and stood up.

Vallabhbhai: *Motakaka, what has brought you here? If you had sent me word, I would have come to Karamsad. I would then have seen Ladba too. Jhaverbhai: But my work is in Borsad. Why should I have called you to Karamsad? Tell me, what is the good of your reputation and influence if a warrant is issued against our Maharaj (priest) and the police threaten to arrest him?*

V.: *A warrant against the Maharaj? He is the incarnation of God Purushottam, powerful enough to free us from the bonds of this world. How dare anyone think of arresting him? J.: I have reliable information that a warrant has been issued against him. It's that quarrel over the Vadtal and Bochasan temples. You must get the warrant cancelled. If he is arrested, it will be a terrible blow to our honour.*

V.: *Why should it affect our honour? There may be a reason for the warrant. Motakaka, you ought to give up these sadhus. Those who intrigue and quarrel and rush to the courts are not likely to help us in this world, and even less in the next one. J.: I didn't come to have a discussion. All I want you to do is to have the warrant cancelled.*⁵²

Yagnapurushdasji, the threatened priest to whom Jhaverbhai was devoted, led a reformist group in the Swaminarayan sect. The sect's temples became bones of contention between his group and the traditionalists, who had accused the priest of trespass. Though sceptical and sarcastic, Vallabh carried out his father's wishes. He could not flout the Patidar code.⁵³ But what he did next was greater than the code.

By now he had saved the Rs. 10,000 that could fetch him the barristership. Quietly he enquired about a passport and a passage to England from Thomas Cook & Son. The company sent him the facts. He wrote again, this time enclosing a draft, and asked for a booking on the ss *Maloja*. The envelope containing his travel documents was addressed, quite properly, to Mr. V. J. Patel, Pleader, Borsad. But it was Vithal who received it. What followed is most simply conveyed in Vallabh's words, uttered in 1921:

*My elder brother said to me, "I am older than you. Let me go to England. After I return you will get the opportunity to go, but I will not be able to go to England after you." I gave my brother fifteen days' time. On the fifteenth day he proceeded to England.*⁵⁴

While he gave Vithal fifteen days, he didn't take even a minute to let his brother retain the passage and the passport, which too

was only in the name of "V. J. Patel".^{*} Moreover, "Vallabhbhai also undertook to meet Vithalbhai's expenses in England".⁵⁵ Without hesitation, and without subsequent regret, he lets another keep the documents for which he had dreamed, sweated and scraped for five years, bullying witnesses, blustering before magistrates and wearing out shoe-leather. To those papers he joins, in effect, another costly promissory note, the fruit of his industry and Jhaverba's thrift, also exercised over a period of five years. That the beneficiary was a blood-brother does not necessarily reduce, and more probably enhances, the nobility of the double-gesture. His response to Vithal's request and to the subtle intervention of Fate, which effortlessly used the common fact of common initials to shunt a life, was proof that something significant was happening inside Vallabh. A forging was proceeding apace, and Destiny was using unseen hammers, anvils and fires to shape and strengthen a character.

In giving Vithal "fifteen days", Vallabh's purpose was to enable the older brother "to make up his mind finally".⁵⁶ While ready to be generous, Vallabhbhai was not willing to become the butt of another Vithalbhai prank, or to let his generosity be trifled with by any vacillation on Vithalbhai's part. Had the older brother not met the stipulation, the right to travel would have reverted to Vallabhbhai. We will often find Vallabh keeping, as on this occasion, a second string to his bow. The practice was being welded into his character.

Not wanting to face Diwaliba's reaction, Vithalbhai kept his plan a secret. "When the day of actual departure came, he told his wife that he was going on some important legal business to Bombay, placed some substantial cash in her hands which was supposed to have come from some client, and bade her *au revoir*."⁵⁷ Diwaliba was not the only person to be astonished when, on his return from Bombay, where he had seen his brother off, Vallabhbhai announced that Vithalbhai had gone to England. Jhaverba had an almost equal reason to be upset, for one of the consequences of Vithalbhai's departure was that Diwaliba had to be given a place under her roof. There was no question of Vallabhbhai asking her to go to her parents; that would have implied that Vithalbhai had deserted her.

Vithalbhai's image and Diwaliba's honour were saved when Vallabhbhai invited Diwaliba to his home, but Jhaverba's peace was ruined, for the hapless Diwaliba was not easy to live with. Not that we can accept as impartial the appraisal of Diwaliba given by Vithalbhai's fond biographer. Vithalbhai's marriage was not a success, and

* When Vallabh pointed out that the passport contained his date of birth, not Vithal's, the latter was not fazed. How the problem of the passport photograph was solved, or whether there was a photograph, is not known. Manibehn's diary entry of 10.7.49 records her father's recollection of the incident.

Gordhandas Patel, the biographer, wishes to spare his hero of any blame for that fact. To him it is Diwaliba who is "overbearing", "self-centred", "without tact" and "without practical knowledge", in addition to being "unlettered", "uncultured" and unable to "tolerate the cordial relationship between the brothers". In short, she was "a problem", forcing Vithalbhai to "somehow make his domestic life as endurable as it could be in the circumstances".⁵⁸ This is a partisan and ex parte judgment, yet the fact of Diwaliba's angularities remains. "Presumably to ensure her husband's safe sojourn abroad and early return, Diwaliba started feeding Brahmins, and observing all manner of penances."⁵⁹

The routine taxed Jhaverba's purse and patience both. She spoke out her mind, Diwaliba did likewise – unflattering remarks about Jhaverba's village might have figured in her remarks – and it was obvious that the two could not live peaceably in the same house. Convinced that he couldn't possibly, in Vithalbhai's absence, send Diwaliba to her parents, Vallabhbhai asked Jhaverba to go to her parents. We do not know whether Jhaverba protested or argued before leaving. All we know is that, taking two-year-old Mani and six-month-old Dahya with her, she went to her parents' home in Gana, and stayed there for nearly two years. Her husband had followed his code and she, a victim of her husband's nobility, had followed hers. The result was an anomaly. Though an older brother's wife enjoyed, in some ways, a mother's status, Diwaliba's stay in Vallabhbhai's house was unconventional. Yet Vallabhbhai seems to have faced no whisper against his character and suffered no loss of reputation.

Wittier and more sociable than his younger brother, even more intolerant than Vallabh of superior airs, Vithal was also less thrifty and more impulsive. But he was capable of great bursts of industry, and sustained one of these during his stay of about two and a half years in England. Finishing his course in 30 rather than the usual 36 months, "in the final examination he stood in the first class, obtaining the first rank and a prize of £ 50 in addition to six months' concession".⁶⁰

In Borsad, before Jhaverba's departure for Gana, Vallabh was at times seen wheeling a pram containing little Dahya into the court compound.⁶¹ More assiduous than ever, he sent money as promised to Vithalbhai and saved afresh for the journey to England that he still hoped to make. His keenness for it was in fact sharper than before, for he was finding it galling to sit in court as assistant to mediocre barristers engaged by wealthy clients. They would come down to Borsad from Ahmedabad and, despite their inferiority, collect large fees. Armed with impressive letters of recommendation, Vithalbhai

returned to India in August of 1908 and was immediately admitted to the chamber in Bombay of Mr Inverarity, a leading light of the Bombay Bar. The return of one now legitimately styled as Barrister Vithalbhai was the signal for Vallabhbhai to start preparations for his journey, but an event unutterably sad intervened.

Jhaverba, now 29 and mercifully reunited with her husband upon Vithalbhai's return, had fallen ill with an intestinal problem. At the end of 1908 Vallabh took her and the children to Bombay, where, on the advice of doctors, Jhaverba was admitted to the Cama Hospital. A malignant growth was detected for which surgery seemed necessary, but Jhaverba was too weak to be operated upon, and the doctors decided to postpone surgery until she recovered some strength. After some days at her side Vallabh went to Anand where a client, accused of murder, was being tried, leaving instructions that he should be summoned once the date for the operation was fixed. However, Jhaverba's condition worsened as soon as Vallabhbhai left, and immediate surgery seemed unavoidable. It was performed, the result seemed encouraging, and a wire went to Vallabh at Anand informing him of the facts. A somewhat reassured Vallabhbhai then started to cross-examine a key witness. He was pounding the witness with all he had in the Anand courtroom when, at 2 p.m. on January 11, another telegram was handed to him. He opened it, saw that it announced Jhaverba's death, folded it, put it in his pocket, and continued to hammer away until the witness broke down. Not until the court rose did Vallabhbhai give out the shattering news. His will had triumphed over grief, and he had won the battle in the courtroom, but, on January 11, 1909, spirited little Jhaverba had lost her battle in a hospital far away, with neither husband nor mother nor father to hold her hand.⁶²

Mani, four-and-a-half, and Dahya, three, were in Vithalbhai's house in Bandra. "Do you remember anything about your Mother's death?" Manibehn was asked in July 1987. "After being told that my Mother had died, I was taken to a tap, asked to stand under it, and given a bath. That's all I can recall."⁶³

"A volcano in ice." Nineteen years later, that is how Maulana Shaukat Ali would describe Vallabhbhai.⁶⁴ The Anand courtroom saw both the volcano and the ice. It did not see any stream of tears, and could not see the lava of grief that an act of will had contained and confined. Later, too, his grief remained secret. He must have moistened his pillow, a procession of if-onlys must have assailed him, the failure to be at Jhaverba's bedside must have stabbed his heart, but he did not show his misery or talk of it. What he did do was to decide never to marry again. Behind this decision lay his children. Reflecting a quarter century later on the situation of his son

Dahyabhai, who had lost his wife, and of their child Bipin, Vallabhbhai revealed his views on a man's remarriage:

Vallabhbhai to Manibehn, 16.6.33: *It is over a year since Yashoda (Dahyabhai's wife) went, and Dahyabhai has to think of the future. There is sadness for Baba (Bipin) in either course. But the world has learnt from experience not to underestimate the unhappiness that a stepmother can give. The unhappiness of a motherless child is not necessarily greater.*⁶⁵

Unspoken as it was, his love for Jhaverba may have also influenced the decision. Though he never expressed his fondness, neither did he ever whisper its opposite. It may be hard to accept that a man is capable of deep love who never confesses it, but it was impossible for Vallabhbhai to conceal a dislike over a lifetime. His silence about Jhaverba may therefore be evidence of his fondness. Not to show grief or pain was by now part of the Vallabhbhai character, but he was strengthened in his stoicism by a sense that sadness on his face might shatter the children. This explanation is supported by a letter Vallabhbhai wrote almost forty years later to a man who had just lost a 28-year-old son-in-law:

Patel to D. N. Banerjee, 30.5.46: *Your dear daughter of tender age will have to bear the terrible blow that has befallen her and you must be brave.... If you lose heart, what will happen to her? She will look at your face and the tender heart of a devoted Hindu daughter will be broken to pieces under the weight of your sadness....*

*When I was in full vigour of youth, my partner-in-life disappeared suddenly, leaving two young children.*⁶⁶

An incident in the early 1930s, while Patel and Gandhi were the Raj's fellow-prisoners, confirms Vallabhbhai's anxiety over his children's morale. Shortly before an interview with Dahya, Vallabhbhai changed into his best kurta and dhoti. "I want him to think," he explained to Gandhi, "that I am enjoying life here."⁶⁷

"Once I was to become a sadhu."⁶⁸ So said Vallabhbhai to Mahadev Desai after 1918, without indicating when the idea occurred. Was it when Jhaverba suddenly died, leaving two tiny children? If there was an escapist, or wholly spiritual, pull at this juncture, Vallabhbhai successfully resisted it. Before long England returned to his agenda, and he decided that when Mani and Dahya were a little older, they too should study in schools in England. However, Diwaliba, who had joined Vithalbhai in Bombay, fell seriously ill at this stage, and England had to be yielded once more. Diwaliba's illness was

protracted; finally, to give her a change, Vallabhbhai brought her to Borsad, but she too was destined to die young. Her end came a year after Jhaverba's.

Though free at last to execute his dream, Vallabhbhai may have been briefly distracted by the Minto-Morley Reforms of 1909 which, while continuing to deny power to the Indian public, envisaged councils where some elected representatives could at least criticize the government. The meagre advance "quite fascinated" Vithalbhai, "who resolved to find a place for himself in the proposed 'Legislative Council of the Governor of Bombay' ".⁶⁹ Vallabhbhai's goal was England. He sailed in July 1910.

But, emulating his brother, he concealed his imminent departure. Only Vithalbhai and his younger brother Kashibhai, who, by now, had passed the pleaders' test himself, were informed. On the day he was leaving Borsad for England, Vallabhbhai defended a goldsmith charged with trespass with a view to committing adultery. The judge was the British Collector of Kheda – the boss of the whole district –, camping at Borsad, and displaying, on this occasion, the influence of alcohol. Vallabhbhai had little difficulty in rescuing the goldsmith, and the ridicule he poured on the prosecutors "caused a great deal of amusement in the court of the Collector".⁷⁰

In the evening, Mani and Dahya accompanying him, he left for Bombay, entrusting his practice and house to Kashibhai. The next day he boarded the steamer for London, having left Mani and Dahya not with relatives but with a Miss Wilson of Queen Mary's School on Grant Road in Bombay. Miss Wilson was willing to look after them, and Vallabhbhai thought that in her company the children would "learn to talk English more easily" and qualify themselves for schooling in England.⁷¹

Why the secrecy? His own explanation to the folks at Karamsad, sent from London, was that haste was essential to his enrolment; soon a new rule would shut the door to Indians lacking an LL B degree. Elsewhere it has been suggested that Vallabhbhai injected drama into his departure in order to heighten its impact. It is more likely that by avoiding talk Vallabhbhai was avoiding hitches; he had had plenty.⁷²

Clad, for the first time in his life, in trousers, jacket and necktie, and also handling knife-and-fork for the first time, Vallabhbhai faced a very rough sea and was distressingly sick. Abandoning his berth, he lay for three days, unable to eat or drink, in an unoccupied cabin of a superior class before being confronted by the Captain, who had declared Vallabhbhai missing and ordered a search. "This is not your cabin," said the Captain. "You'll pay extra for this." "Deduct it from my deposit," Vallabhbhai replied, "I can't get up now." "Never mind," the Captain conceded. "But we could have helped you," he added, "– given you something for the sickness –, if you had told us.

Don't worry, the others are sick too, but it'll be all right soon." It was, once the ship had crossed Aden, except that now Vallabhbhai was ravenously hungry and asking "for every item on the menu", without knowing what it was.⁷³

Vallabhbhai neglected the shores of the Red Sea and the Mediterranean and did not take the overland option between Port Said and Suez: he was reading Justinian's Roman Law and finished the last chapter as the ship entered Marseilles. A train took him from Marseilles to Calais, whence, via Dover, he reached London. An incident that took place in Dover reveals the chip on the Patel shoulder. A customs official studied the hookah-tobacco that Vallabhbhai was carrying and asked, "What's this?" "An Indian sweet," replied the visitor. "You can taste it." The customs official did as he was bidden, felt the gur in the concoction and said, "Very nice, very nice." Vallabhbhai was off and away by the time the customs man felt other sensations.⁷⁴

Vithalbhai had introduced Vallabhbhai, before his ship left Bombay, to another passenger, a minor Thakore (raja) from Kathiawad, who, on arrival in London, made for Hotel Cecil; so did Vallabhbhai. The next day, settling a large bill halved by an understanding manager, Vallabhbhai moved to the lodgings of an Indian acquaintance. Thereafter Vallabhbhai lived in a succession of digs. Four landladies are referred to in his Thomas Cook & Son pass-book: Mrs Patrick, Mrs Smith, Mrs A. Thomas and Mrs Williams, names as common in the U.K. as Patel in Gujarat. These ladies received two or three pounds a week from him. His addresses, over a thirty-month period, were 23 Aldridge Villas Road, 62 Oxford Terrace, 2 South Hill Park Gardens, 57 Adelaide Road and 5 Eton Road. The pass-book, one of the few relics of Vallabhbhai's London stay, contains most of these addresses and offers other hints regarding his life at the time. There is, for instance, a payment to Selfridges, the department store. Entries of outgoings to "J. M. Parikh", "R. S. Mehta", "S. D. Mehta" and "N. H. Setalwad" suggest that the Indians he dealt and moved with were, in the main, Gujaratis. Two months after his arrival he pays Middle Temple, the college he joins, a sum of £ 74, clearly his fees or a portion thereof. Other entries point to two prizes he won.⁷⁵

He "did" the renowned sights of London in his first week, not wanting unsatisfied curiosity to distract him later, when studies would need all his concentration. In him a down-to-earth Patidar of 35 had gone to England, knowing just what he wanted from it – the title of Barrister –, not a young romantic or a political activist. To beauty, in art or flesh, he did not offer a second look. He had children to raise – his plans for raising them were expensive – and a goal to reach. The theatre found no place on his agenda, and neither did outings in pleasant company. While keen, as we noted earlier, "to see the people

who, living 7,000 miles away, were able to rule us for long'', he was content with the glimpses that fell his way; his primary aim was to study for his tests, not study the English people or the English landscape, neither of which find any mention in the letters he sent home.

His twice-daily walk between Aldridge Villas Road, Bayswater, and the Middle Temple – 4 ³/₄ miles each way – took him past parks and edifices of great charm or magnificence, including Kensington Gardens, Buckingham Palace, St James's Park, Cleopatra's Needle and Waterloo Bridge. When he moved digs his walks were as long or longer and not less scenic. What he saw must have impinged on him, and we should perhaps reconsider the remark that he did not give beauty a second look. A walker's mind may seek to occupy itself by memorising lessons or reciting duties that lie ahead, but the exercise cannot be repeated endlessly without some loss of concentration. Vallabhbhai would surely have stopped to think and started to look, and to look again, at some of the places he walked past, and savoured satisfaction.

Some Indians studying in England were attracted by political activity but not Vallabhbhai. No doubt, as the hookah-tobacco incident showed, he resented British rule over India and the notion of the Englishman's racial superiority. The fire seen in his breath in the future, when he attacked Englishmen "who were calling others uncivilized",⁷⁶ was smouldering inside him even in 1910-13. But he pushed it down. Madanlal Dhingra's 1907 murder of Sir Curzon Wylie at a public meeting in London and Dhingra's subsequent hanging were live subjects for the Indian student community in England when Vallabhbhai joined it, but Dhingra's deed troubled him and he steered clear of politics.

One unusual London experience was later described by Vallabhbhai. In one of the houses where he took lodgings, he used to hear a woman's cries coming from the basement. One day, while the landlady was away, a cleaning woman told Vallabhbhai that the sister of the landlady's husband was being ill-treated and confined. Vallabhbhai moved out of the house within 24 hours and also informed the police. It seems that the woman obtained relief.⁷⁷

He was admitted, we saw, to the Middle Temple, one of the Inns of Court, as London's law colleges were called. Here he had to keep nine terms spread over three years and eat a minimum number of dinners each term, just as Mohandas Gandhi, Muhammad Ali Jinnah and Vithalbhai had done before him in one Inn or another. We may note, too, that it was precisely in 1910 that Jawaharlal Nehru, younger than Vallabhbhai by fourteen years, was admitted to the Inner Temple. Jawaharlal came to his Inn by way of Harrow and Cambridge, not via Petlad, Nadiad and Borsad or their equivalents.

There is no record of Vallabhbhai and Jawaharlal ever meeting in London. Though physically and academically near each other, they lived in different worlds. Of Jawaharlal's appearance and interests at the time, his biographer Michael Brecher says:

He was a very handsome, slim young man, with black hair and a moustache, debonair in his Bond Street clothes. He frequented the proper clubs and restaurants, whiled away his time at the theatre and at social functions of the young aristocrats.... In the summer he did Europe.⁷⁸

If Jawaharlal's law studies "took up relatively little time", Vallabhbhai's filled his day. Leaving his digs early – often at 7 a.m. –, his face dark and impassive, its strength not apparent when fleetingly observed, his mind concentrated, he would walk in a cap and plain suit to the Middle Temple and stand outside the door of the library, waiting for it to be opened, and not end his reading until "Time" was pronounced at 6 p.m. He would keep going during the day with the help of bread, milk and tea, and then walk back. A keen smoker – cigarettes replacing the hookah –, sampling meat for the first time in his life but not, as far as we know, taking liquor, Vallabhbhai probably did not, in all his stay, eat a single meal in an expensive restaurant. However, he did buy some "well-cut clothes", noticed on his return to India. In January 1911, he and a classmate called Godfrey Davis, who later became Chief Justice of Sind, won five pounds each for topping a paper on Equity. Though subdued in expression, his joy is evident in the letter he sent to Narsibhai:

Respected brother Narsibhai, I have written one examination. I have passed in the first rank. Please express my salutation to respected Father and Mother, and keep sending news regularly. Kashibhai does not write at all.... God willing the two years would pass before long and I will be able to set eyes on all of you. Obeisances from your servant Vallabhbhai.⁷⁹

If he so wished, a student could write his finals after about twenty months in England; if he passed with honours and then spent another term eating the stipulated dinners at his Inn, he was called to the bar about six months in advance. As Vithalbhai had done before him, Vallabhbhai wrote his finals after a 20-month stay, passed in the first class and claimed the £ 50 prize:

To Narsibhai, from Middle Temple, London, 7.6.1912: *My examination is over. I have passed in the first division, so I will be able to return six months early. Next January I will be back.... Please*

*let Mother and Father know. And please inform friends. That's all. Your servant Vallabhbhai's obeisances.*⁸⁰

Vallabhbhai seems to have sat down in his college and written this letter the moment he heard that he had passed with honours. He was yet to know of his first rank or the prize, which, as his pass-book shows, he received a month later. He had an advantage, true, of age and experience over most of his classmates, but his lack of any college or university grounding makes his feat the more notable.

His children were on his mind and he did not look forward to the prescribed idleness of the six months ahead of him – the summer holidays that would last till September, and then the lazy term with its obligatory dinners. Not one to regard an English convention as an inflexible rule, he asked to be spared the term of no study, citing his performance and also his health, which had been affected by overwork. The Constitution Committee of his Inn was duly convened to examine this unusual, not to say pert, plea. Applying itself “very carefully” to the question, having “no objection” – in theory – to considering Vallabhbhai’s request, the committee nonetheless felt disinclined to create a precedent for others less qualified than Vallabhbhai.⁸¹ One reason why a people “living 7,000 miles away” were ruling India was that they had perfected the art of clothing a firm “no” in a blanket of polite reasonableness.

Vallabhbhai spent the summer of 1912 travelling in England, Scotland and Ireland but sent home no accounts of what he saw. A part of one sentence sums up two months of touring: “After the results were out I moved about in the countryside.” He adds that the change of air has greatly benefited his health. The rest of the letter breathes impatience to return home.⁸² He had no wish to linger in the U.K., and, later, no hankering to return there. As for the Indians he ran into, some of them seemed irresponsible. One borrowed £ 75 from him but later became resentful when, requiring the money for an operation on his leg, Vallabhbhai asked for it. The debt was only cleared after the two returned to India.

A German surgeon in London had proposed the operation in lieu of an amputation prescribed by other doctors. According to one possibly true story, the operation was performed without the use of chloroform, revealing that Vallabhbhai had not lost the stoicism displayed 12 years earlier in the hot-poker-and-boil incident.^{82a} Opening a hospital in Bombay in 1948, Vallabhbhai would recall the London surgery:

I had come out with guinea-worm in England. People there had no experience of it. They kept giving me injections. When after noticing blisters on my leg I looked up a book on tropical diseases

I realized that my problem was this (guinea-worm). I told the doctors. Twice I was operated upon. Because of gangrene they were ready to cut off my leg. [In the end only] some veins were cut. I had to be in hospital for two-and-a-half months.^{82b}

Ambalal and Sarladevi Sarabhai of Ahmedabad would later recall that they were first acquainted with Vallabhbhai in London in 1912.⁸³ Another recollection has been provided by A. R. Wadia, a fellow student:

Vallabhbhai had a rough appearance but a great sense of humour and he was not above cracking jokes which bordered on the vulgar....

Cowasji Dotiwala was one of the Sardar's best friends in London. He was full of humour but extremely nervous. On the day of an examination he was so nervous that he would try to avoid appearing at all. At the time of the final examination Vallabhbhai went to Cowasji's room and dragged him to the examination hall. Cowasji did pass and the credit for this has to go almost entirely to Vallabhbhai....⁸⁴

The idle term finally ended in December 1912 but it was not until January that Vallabhbhai was called to the Bar. Before that, however, he had to find a Bencher – an elect jurist entitled to eat at an Inn's high table – to propose his name and another Bencher to support it. After going through the list of Benchers, none of whom he knew, Vallabhbhai called on one of them, even though he was "neither introduced nor recommended to him".⁸⁵ Chance led him to just the right man, a cousin, as Vallabhbhai soon discovered, of Sir Basil Scott, Chief Justice of Bombay. Scott's cousin not only agreed to sponsor Vallabhbhai's name; he also found a supporter.

The ceremony of being called to the Bar "was held with great dignity and pomp, and the members marched in procession. As Vallabhbhai had won the first rank, he was given a position of honour."⁸⁶ Karamsad's ploughboy had made good. After the ceremony was over, Scott's cousin invited Vallabhbhai to dine with him the following day, but the peasant's son had to decline the gracious invitation. The boat that would take him to his children, brothers and parents was leaving the next morning. Though Scott's cousin couldn't give Vallabhbhai dinner, he gave something else: an introduction to Sir Basil. Vallabhbhai put the note in his pocket and, for the last time, walked back to his distant lodgings.

We may mark, before bidding adieu to Vallabhbhai's time in London, that it seems to have cost him £ 450 over a period of about 30 months, that his passage back to India came to £ 33, and that

insurance for his baggage cost him 15s. 3d., or three-fourths of a guinea.

* * *

The experiment of leaving Mani and Dahya in Miss Wilson's care had its stiff moments. Six when her father left for England, Mani refused to take a shower in her skins and was asked to miss a meal for disobeying school rules. After about two years as boarders, and following an attack Dahya had of whooping cough, he and Mani were moved to uncle Vithalbhai's home in Bandra from where they journeyed each day to the Grant Road School. During holidays they were often in Nadiad with aunt Dahiba, Vallabhbhai's only sister, who was married to a man called Thakorebhai Nathabhai Patel. When Vallabhbhai returned to Indian shores on February 13, 1913, Mani and Dahya, now 9 and 7 1/2 were at Bombay harbour, and so was Vithalbhai, who, fulfilling his hope, had become a member of the new Bombay Council.

That very day, using the letter of introduction he was carrying, Vallabhbhai was able to meet Sir Basil Scott, the Chief Justice, who showed great courtesy. In his letter, Scott's cousin had expressed the hope that Vallabhbhai would become a judge, but on the barrister informing Scott that this was not his desire, the Chief Justice offered assistance should Vallabhbhai choose to practise in Bombay. "It may take years before clients come to know me here," replied Vallabhbhai, adding that at his age – 37 now – he could not afford to mark time. "Well," said Sir Basil, "would you like to teach in the evenings in the Government Law School?" A part-time job of this kind would make Bombay less of a leap into the unknown, but Vallabhbhai had made up his mind. He thanked Sir Basil for his interest but told him that he had chosen Ahmedabad, next-door to his roots – 50 miles northwest of Karamsad – rather than the great metropolis. Actually, even as he was talking to Sir Basil, clients in the Gujarat districts were waiting for Vallabhbhai to return and take up their cases.⁸⁷ The next morning he left for Gujarat. The children remained with Vithalbhai in Bandra: Mani was transferred ere long to St. Joseph's Convent, where she would study until 1917; Dahya was enrolled in a boys' school.

Clients in Ahmedabad did not allow Vallabhbhai to mark time. A description of "the new barrister who had come" has been left by fellow lawyer Ganesh Vasudev Mavlankar, Vallabhbhai's neighbour and associate in Ahmedabad and, after independence, the first speaker of the Lok Sabha:

A smart young man, dressed in well-cut clothes, with a felt hat worn slightly at an angle, stern and reserved, his eyes piercing and bright, receiving visitors with just a simple greeting but not entering into any conversation,... he looked down upon the world with a sort of superiority complex.

The new barrister was naturally a centre of attention for the junior bar. His personality and demeanour attracted them but they had mixed feelings of respect, awe and perhaps of subdued resentment at the way he seemed to look at others.⁸⁸

The three-year absence from courts had not inhibited him. Mavlankar noted that Vallabhbhai

would never allow a judge to overstep in the least the limits of courtesy, nor would he allow or tolerate any improper leaning on the part of the court in favour of the police.... He would spare neither the judge nor the prosecutor nor the police, and called a spade a spade.⁸⁹

Mavlankar gives an illustration. A Sessions Judge was trying two brothers accused of murder. They belonged to the crime-prone district of Kheda, Vallabhbhai's own. When Vallabhbhai applied for bail for the accused, the police opposed the plea, contending that the accused were likely to tamper with the evidence and adding, "This is a Kheda case and the accused should be taken to be dangerous persons." The judge agreed with the police and refused bail, whereupon Vallabhbhai exclaimed:

No accused from Kheda gets a fair trial in this court. If there is insufficient evidence, it is suggested that the accused, being a Kheda man, must have tampered with it. The district is considered to be criminal, so the accused must be convicted – that appears to be the reasoning.

What followed has been told by Mavlankar:

Vallabhbhai said this in open court in the presence of a large number of lawyers. The judge was stunned at this frontal attack.... He said: "Mr Patel, you are obviously in an excited mood. We will adjourn and meet in half an hour." The judge then went to his chamber and immediately passed orders granting bail which he had refused earlier. Needless to add, the trial resulted in the acquittal of the accused.⁹⁰

Vallabhbhai would pounce without mercy on any flaw in the police's case, as when he noticed overwriting on a first information report of a murder. The police patel (village functionary of the police department) who had drawn up the report was in the witness-box.

Vallabhbhai: Did you alter the names of the murderers recorded in the first report? Police Patel: The father of the deceased mentioned two names, thereafter the wife in her statement gave two other names. I had, therefore, to make the necessary corrections. V.: Did you take money for changing the names? P.P.: I took nothing. V.: You are a regular Dharmaraj, aren't you? But I know you police patels. You fellows cause murders, arson and thefts. You even receive stolen property. You are giving evidence on oath. Tell the truth, otherwise my questions will expose all your misdeeds.

The witness broke down and the two accused were acquitted.⁹¹

We are now at a four-year period in Vallabhbhai's life – early 1913 to the end of 1916 – when he seemed content with the envy and awe he had aroused, the money he made and the friends, comfort and leisure he had found. His fees reaching the point where they became about the highest in Ahmedabad, he could now, without taking too many cases, not only provide for his Bombay-based children and assist the folks at Karamsad, but also meet a fair part of Vithalbhai's expenses. We saw that just before Vallabhbhai's return from England Vithalbhai had become a member of the Bombay Council. This council was filled by officials and nominees of the government and by some like Vithalbhai who were indirectly elected to it. Vithalbhai occupied the sole seat to which all the local boards of Bombay presidency's northern division, taken together, were entitled. The board of Borsad taluka had sponsored Vithalbhai, who defeated a rival from Nadiad by 28 votes to 12 and became the Honourable Vithalbhai Patel.

Shortly after Vallabhbhai's return, the brothers reached a pact that "one of us should serve the country and the other the family". Vithalbhai having joined the council, Vallabhbhai's part was to look after his brother's needs in Bombay. When visiting Ahmedabad, Vithalbhai would stay with Vallabhbhai; on arrival he would let his host perform the deferential ritual of untying the older brother's laces; on Vithalbhai's departure Vallabhbhai would fill the older brother's pocket with currency notes, yet uttering not a word that might suggest that he was doing so.⁹³ He was to say in 1921: "My brother gave up his flourishing practice and started on a career of public service, while I bore the burden of maintaining the household. I had thus to commit all the sins and he performed all the good

deeds.”⁹³ It was sinful, in other words, to earn money, and virtuous to be in politics.

Old Jhaverbhai, their father, who never omitted the monthly visit, at full moon, to the Swaminarayan temple in Vadtal, died in March 1914 at the age of 85. The barrister brothers wanted to dispense with some of the post-death ceremonies, which seemed pointless and wasteful to them, but a letter that Vithalbhai wrote at the time to senior brothers Somabhai and Narsibhai suggests that while his opposition was uncompromising, Vallabhbhai’s was flexible:

*You have requested me to come. I would most readily come but only if my wishes are respected. Vallabhbhai might possibly share your views. In that case you may act according to his advice.... If you want me to come, you must let me know if you intend following my advice.*⁹⁴

The brothers’ only sister Dahiba, the youngest of Jhaverbhai’s and Ladba’s children, also died at about this time. When the seriousness of her illness became evident, Vallabhbhai fetched her from Nadiad to his Ahmedabad residence but to no avail. The death, in her early thirties, of Dahiba, who had no children and was very fond of Mani and Dahya, greatly saddened Vallabhbhai, who would remark from time to time that Dahi (good) lived up to her name.⁹⁵

For his residence Vallabhbhai had rented a six-room, double-storeyed house in Bhadra in the centre of Ahmedabad, flanked on either side by a street. Mavlankar lived across one side street. Across the street on the opposite side was the Gujarat Club. Next to the Club were some of the city’s principal courts. Twelve years younger than Vallabhbhai, Mavlankar became a good friend, as did several others, but the one to whom Vallabhbhai drew closest was Balwantray Kanuga, the physician.

Dropping in at the home of the Kanugas, and dining there, became second nature with Vallabhbhai. With Dr. Balwantray and his wife Vijayagauri, or Nandubehn as she was more often called, Vallabhbhai would shed much of his reserve and aggressiveness, be more truly himself, and speak of what was on his heart. We know that this friendship between Vallabhbhai and the Kanugas was deep, and that it lasted until death, all three dying within a space of fourteen months. There are a few letters that testify to its closeness, but of the conversations that marked the friendship there appears to be no record. Vallabhbhai probably confided some things only to the Kanugas.

Did he bring up with the Kanugas the possibility of his marrying again, if only to reject the idea? The temptation to remarry, and hints and offers, must have come at this stage. At the end of 1915 he was

forty, when life appears to begin again; he was an acknowledged success; and the argument that his children needed a woman in the house might have seemed both sound and appealing. Of the "irrevocable decision not to marry again" taken by Vithalbhai, who too had lost his wife, his biographer says that "it was as much a case of once bitten twice shy as of loyalty to a departed memory".⁹⁶ In Vallabhbhai's case, however, for all the suppression of his feeling for Jhaverba, there is no record of a remark or hint from him or from anyone close to him to suggest that he saw his marriage as a failure, or that he took a poor view of married life, or that he disliked the company of women. But he had decided that his children would have no step-mother. The temptation and offers were summarily rejected.

Some of Vallabhbhai's friends of this phase have spoken of his "jovial" nature.⁹⁷ A little mellowness now entered Vallabhbhai's character, but it would be a mistake to think that his personality had become "pleasant". Meeting him for the first time in 1913, Kunverji Mehta of Bardoli was frightened by Vallabhbhai's "slanted glance" and by the "fiery pellets that flew from his eyes".⁹⁸ His mouth continued to pour scorn, which evoked not smiles or giggles but bursts of laughter and reverential fear. When clients told their story, the face they saw remained stern but it was not motionless; his fingers would work on it, smoothing the moustache or rubbing the tip of the nose. And to cogitate he would get up and start to pace, out of habit but also because there was a restlessness in the centre of his calm.

He wore fashionable and even, perhaps, "foppish" clothes, as his grandson Bipin, Dahyabhai's son, would afterwards hear.⁹⁹ Dissatisfied with Ahmedabad's cleaners, he sent stiff collars to Bombay to be washed.¹⁰⁰ The Borsad pleader in his dhoti was now only a memory. "I used to think," Vallabhbhai would say in the future, referring to this period, "that the summum bonum of life lay in imitating the foreigner – in speech, in dress, in all things that mattered."¹⁰¹ English was the language he favoured. He had evidently switched wholly to it in London and it was the preferred medium in the courts of Ahmedabad and among his friends. "I didn't even speak Gujarati well enough," he would recall.¹⁰²

In Bombay, Mani and Dahya spoke to each other in English, studied French in school and did not "write or speak Gujarati properly".¹⁰³ Their visits to Father in Ahmedabad were rare, as were his to Bombay. Sixty years later his daughter would recall one of Vallabhbhai's Bombay trips: "We went with him in an old-style horse-carriage to buy clothes. He was wearing a suit and a peaked cap. I remember that he got me a silk frock, a silk lehnga and a blouse." Mani would also remember visits to Whiteway & Laidlaw for buying boots, ribbons and handkerchiefs.¹⁰⁴

Many of Patel's evenings were spent at the Gujarat Club, where upstarts were ridiculed, bridge played, cigarette tins emptied, scandal passed on and, at times, politics and civic needs discussed. Vallabhbhai, who had tried bridge at Borsad, now found that he had quite a flair for it. Others talked of it, and Messrs Wadia and Broker, the former a senior barrister convinced of his proficiency in the game, which he felt he had introduced to the Club, challenged Patel to find a partner and play against them. Vallabhbhai said he would, provided the stakes were raised from an anna or two a point to five pounds for a hundred points. Agreeing, Messrs W. and B. lost 15 to 20 pounds on the first day. Members ceased their gossip the next day, crowded round the foursome and saw W. and B. lose another 25 to 30 pounds. On the third day Mrs Wadia "stopped her husband from going to the Club" and also implored Patel "to be good enough to discourage her husband from continuing the match". We learn that Vallabhbhai "readily agreed".¹⁰⁵

Godfrey Davis, his Middle Temple friend, had joined the ICS. Posted to Ahmedabad as an Assistant Collector, he paid a surprise visit to Vallabhbhai's home.¹⁰⁶ Was Vallabhbhai on course for a judgeship, or a knighthood, or both? A Sir Vallabhbhai with a blunt and earthy brilliance would have been a rare prize for the empire and its establishment, a rough diamond valuable precisely for its roughness, capable, if won over by the Raj, of bringing to it the loyalty of a proud and patriotic peasantry and, symbolically, of the very soil of India. Perhaps it was an instinctive prevision of this kind – misty, no doubt, and with the barest of outlines, but attractive enough – that impelled Scott's cousin to write that earnest letter, and the Chief Justice himself to make that considerate offer. Indians elegant in mind and manners were not hard for the Raj to lure, but of their backbone the empire-builders could seldom be certain, whereas with Vallabhbhai it was always his masculinity that struck the Raj's custodians, from 1913 right until the days of Wavell and Mountbatten and the departure of the last British soldiers from the Gateway of India. The Raj would have given much for a Sir Vallabhbhai.

Yet Destiny, though it was marking time and had placed next to Patel a ladder that led to the pinnacles of the Raj, had other plans. In April 1915 it brought to Ahmedabad another barrister, Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, who had spent over twenty years in South Africa. There seemed no doubt that this man, six years older than Vallabhbhai, had achieved unexpected and even remarkable results in South Africa, where he fought for the equality of Indians with whites. He had been called a Mahatma within a month of his return, but Vallabhbhai's reaction to this was, "We already have too many mahatmas."¹⁰⁷ Curiosity took some members of the Gujarat Club to

the ashram in Kochrab, in the city, that Gandhi had started. The word they brought back was of Gandhi's faith in weapons called satyagraha, or truth-force, and ahimsa, or non-violence. He seemed to think that these weapons could help Indians and even secure their liberty from foreign rule. Also, he wanted educated Indians to grind grain and clean lavatories.

Patel laughed and made others laugh even more with his ridicule of "the crank" and sarcasm about Gandhi's "brilliant ideas".¹⁰⁸ Some members inviting him, Gandhi even came to the Club, and there was a gravitation towards the lawn where Gandhi was to speak. Vallabhbhai resented this movement past his bridge-table on the verandah and tried to arrest it. We have a picture of the incident, and can place it in the summer of 1916, thanks to subsequent accounts of it given by Mavlankar, who had been watching Patel in action at the bridge-table. As soon as Mavlankar saw Gandhi coming, he got up.

Patel: *Mavlankar, where are you going? Why have you got up?*
 Mavlankar: *Look, here is Gandhi coming. P.: So what. You'll learn more if you watch our game. I can tell you what he'll say. He will ask you if you know how to sift pebbles from wheat. And that is supposed to bring independence.*¹⁰⁹

At this the laughter was loud but Mavlankar went after Gandhi. In Mavlankar's view, Vallabhbhai himself, though he had "spoken in his peculiar way" about Gandhi, had begun by now to entertain "respect for the man".¹¹⁰ Also, as Patel would admit more than a quarter century later, he was intrigued to find in 1915 and 1916 – while he was journeying towards and past his fortieth birthday – that Gandhi had gathered young men of outstanding intellectual quality around him.¹¹¹ Vallabhbhai marked five of them: D. B. Kalelkar, (Swami) Anand, K. G. Mashruwala, Mahadev Desai and Narhari Parikh. He had run into Mahadev and Narhari in the courts – they too were lawyers – and noted the calibre of all five. Another factor was subtly at work: that well-suppressed tug in Vallabh towards renunciation. Though outwardly mocking it, he could not wholly dismiss a remark by a friend beside the card table that the public could not be served from the Club.¹¹² It had an annoying ring of truth and lent relevance to Gandhi.

In October 1916 a nationally significant event took place in Ahmedabad. A division dating back to 1906, when the Indian National Congress, founded in 1885, had split into two, was bridged. Lokmanya Tilak, who had led the "extremists" in 1906 and was incarcerated from 1908 to 1914, was for the first time seen on the same platform with "moderate" leaders, all taking part in the Bombay Presidency Political Conference, as it was called. The gathering had been

convened by the Gujarat Sabha, established in 1884, its object being "to place the grievances and difficulties of the public before the government".¹¹³ Muhammad Ali Jinnah, at the time a keen advocate of Hindu-Muslim unity, was asked to preside.

Despite his pact with Vithalbhai, which had left politics to the older brother, Vallabhbhai attended this conference, held more or less across the street from him. He must have been interested and also perhaps a shade put out to find Gandhi in a prominent role. Formally proposing Jinnah to the chair, Gandhi also moved a resolution objecting to a ban on the entry into Bombay presidency of Annie Besant, the Irishwoman who had made India her home and Home Rule for India her mission. There was nothing radical about the resolution but Vallabhbhai noticed that Gandhi's voice and his words were serious. Vallabhbhai did not open his mouth at the meeting but it interested him enough to want to go in December to Lucknow, where both Congress and the Muslim League were to hold their annual sessions.

The two bodies agreed in Lucknow to work jointly for "early self-government" on the basis of direct elections, separate electorates for Muslims and Sikhs, and quotas for religious minorities in provincial and central assemblies. Tilak, Annie Besant and Jinnah were the architects of the pact. The cry of "Home Rule" was to go up in many parts of India in 1917, but Vallabhbhai was not gripped. The front and the cry lacked teeth. If, as was more than likely, the Raj rejected the plea, Congress would merely cry "Home Rule" again; it had no struggle in mind. Vallabhbhai did not raise the "Home Rule" slogan or join a Congress committee or request Vithalbhai to release him from their pact. He just forgot Lucknow and resumed his practice.

However, there was one semi-political challenge he accepted. The Raj had decided that John Shillidy, ICS, should guide the municipality of Ahmedabad as municipal commissioner. Vallabhbhai's friends at the Gujarat Club were offended. One of them, Sir Ramanbhai Nilkanth, was the municipal president, and another, Rao Saheb Harilalbhai, the chairman of the municipality's managing committee, the very men whose wings Shillidy would clip and who found Shillidy to be "rather arrogant and self-opinionated".¹¹⁴ Seeing Vallabhbhai as the only man in Ahmedabad who would stand up to Shillidy, they pressed him to enter the city board, contending that municipal duties would not conflict with Patel's practice. Early in 1917, Vallabhbhai "allowed himself to be persuaded".¹¹⁵ Whether or not he obtained Vithalbhai's permission for this deviation from the pact is not known. Standing in a by-election, Vallabhbhai won, but a plea for setting aside his victory was successful. In the re-election no one opposed Vallabhbhai. By the summer of 1917 he was not only

a member of the city board but also the chairman of its sanitary committee.

Meanwhile, in April, a singular event had occurred in the district of Champaran in faraway Bihar. Invited there by workers in indigo plantations who alleged unfair treatment by their European masters, Gandhi was studying the situation when W. B. Heycock, the district magistrate, ordered him to leave the district. Refusing to obey, Gandhi replied:

*I feel it to be my duty to say that I am unable to leave this district, but if it pleases the authorities I shall [suffer] the penalty of disobedience. I have disregarded the order served upon me in obedience to the higher law of our being, the voice of conscience.*¹¹⁶

When, on a hot and sleepy day, word of Gandhi's defiance reached the Gujarat Club, Rao Saheb Harilalbhai "shot up from his chair" and said: "Mavlankar, here is a man, a hero, a brave man! We must have him as our (Gujarat Sabha's) president."¹¹⁷ As Mavlankar would recall, Vallabhbhai "immediately concurred".¹¹⁸ Thus was forged, in the third week of April 1917, the first link in the chain that would bind Vallabhbhai Patel to Gandhi.¹¹⁹ Vallabhbhai's disdain and disparagement had ceased after that Ahmedabad meeting the previous October, but it was the news from Champaran – Gandhi's firm yet dignified rebuff to the Raj – that decided Vallabhbhai.

The Champaran episode probably reinforced Vallabhbhai in his view that the Ahmedabad municipality could be freed of Shillidy. He did not want to fire before he had reliable ammunition but it did not take him long to collect it. Shillidy had been over-generous to a municipal councillor and owner of a match factory called Fateh Mohamed Munshi, who had encroached on municipal land. Munshi's claims to the land had been rejected by the courts, but he continued to occupy it thanks to Shillidy, who ruled that Munshi's contributions to the war loans justified the favour. As if this was not provocation enough, Shillidy also "edited", before its dispatch, a letter from the city board to the government, removing several significant words.

Charging Shillidy with "deliberate insubordination",¹²⁰ Patel urged the board to remove him. Such language against a British ICS officer was unprecedented,¹²¹ but Shillidy had supplied Vallabhbhai and the rest of the board with irrefutable evidence against himself. Even supporters of the Raj, and there were many on the board, found it difficult to challenge the facts, and Vallabhbhai's resolution was passed in June 1917. Unable to defend Shillidy, the Government was obliged to transfer him. When his successor, another ICS officer called Alfred Master, asked for "various allowances in addition to his pay",

and Rao Saheb Harilalbhair, the chairman of the managing committee, passed on Master's letters to Patel for his comments, Vallabhbhai "merely filed these papers". Later, when Master asked Harilalbhair for a response to his request, the managing committee chairman turned towards Vallabhbhai who

*immediately replied that the Government had appointed Mr. Master after fixing his salary and allowances, and if he was not satisfied with those terms, he was at liberty to go. Mr Master had received his reply and shortly afterwards left municipal service.*¹²²

It was an incident that Alfred Master did not forget, as we will see much later.

Electrified by the Champaran news, the Gujarat Sabha leaders, hitherto quite deferential in their stance towards the Raj, acted on Rao Bahadur Harilalbhair's suggestion and requested Gandhi to accept the Sabha's presidentship. He agreed, and the Sabha's character was soon to be transformed. Annie Besant, meanwhile, had been interned, and while Congress discussed a resolution demanding her release, Gandhi suggested that a hundred volunteers should walk from Bombay to the Nilgiris and invite arrest if disallowed to meet Mrs Besant. Congress turned down the idea, but Vallabhbhai again noted that Gandhi was proposing more than words. In September Annie Besant was released, and it was announced that Edwin Montagu, the new Secretary of State, would visit India the following month to examine the possibility of reforms.

Gandhi now proposed, and this time the leaders of Congress agreed, that signatures be collected for a memorandum for Montagu, demanding Swaraj. Gandhi's suggestion that the memorandum should be in the local languages was also accepted. In Gujarat Gandhi drafted a short memorandum and had the Gujarat Sabha collect signatures. There was "an outburst of energy", and by the end of September more than 8,000 signatures had been collected, a large figure for the time.¹²³ "I felt that Gandhi's ten lines had greater force than a hundred-page memorandum," Vallabhbhai was afterwards to say.¹²⁴ On September 30, for the first time, he took part in a Gandhi-initiated activity. "Dressed in a fashionably-cut black English suit",¹²⁵ Vallabhbhai travelled down by train to his old haunt, Borsad, and addressed a meeting where he called for signatures..

In about a month – early in November 1917 – Vallabhbhai "came in direct contact with Gandhi for the first time".¹²⁶ The two took part in the Gujarat Political Conference in Godhra in the Panchmahals district, an even older haunt for Patel than Borsad. The Gujarat Sabha had convened it, and Gandhi was presiding. He did unusual things.

First, he tore up the draft of the resolution of loyalty to the King, with which every political conference in India was supposed to begin. Pointing out that meetings in England proceeded without "loyalty" resolutions, Gandhi said that "loyalty could be presumed until they declared themselves rebels".¹²⁷ This was precisely the sort of gesture that would appeal to Vallabhbhai. Next, contending that Swaraj was dependent on "widespread peasant backing",¹²⁸ Gandhi urged every speaker, including Tilak, who had come from Poona, and Jinnah and Vithalbhai, who had come from Bombay, to speak in an Indian language.

While Tilak spoke in Marathi, Vithalbhai, used to the English medium of the Bombay Council, had to struggle with his Gujarati, and even the anglicised Jinnah "stammered out a speech in Gujarati".¹²⁹ However, a bad taste was left in Jinnah's mouth. Gandhi was to express the opinion 27 years later that "Jinnah has hated me since the day I asked him in a meeting to give up English and speak in Gujarati".¹³⁰ If Gandhi's diagnosis was correct, he lost Jinnah at the meeting where he won Patel, for at Godhra Vallabhbhai agreed, at Gandhi's request, to serve as secretary of the Gujarat Sabha's first executive committee, formed to enable the Sabha to have a year-round role.

As Gandhi was soon to confess, Vallabhbhai seemed "haughty" to him when they met at Godhra, and Gandhi wondered "whether he would be able to do what I wanted".¹³¹ Yet Gandhi rightly discerned that he needed Vallabhbhai. As he would say afterwards, "The more I came to know him, the more I realised that I must secure his help."¹³² The first question on which Gandhi sought Patel's help was forced labour. It was customary for an official visiting a village to require the carpenter to make pegs for his tent, the potter to provide earthen vessels and fetch water in them, the barber to clean the lamps, the sweeper to sweep and run errands, the grocer to supply foodstuffs, and a cart-owning peasant to transport his luggage to the next village. Referred to as *veth*, these services were seldom paid for; when they were, the village workmen were compelled to "remain in attendance for hours and sometimes for days on end".¹³³ The Godhra conference asked the executive committee to meet senior officials and strive for an early end to the "unjust and evil custom".

After the conference Vallabhbhai sent a letter about *veth* to Frederick Pratt, who as Commissioner of the Northern Division of Bombay presidency was the Raj's chief officer in Gujarat. The letter was to the effect that the Gujarat Sabha intended to urge the public to discontinue *veth*, believing it to be illegal, but wanted, before doing so, to find out whether or not the government regarded it as illegal.

If veth was seen as legal, added Patel, could the government explain why? Vallabhbhai's letter was drafted by Gandhi, a procedure that would be often repeated.

An apparently reliable report reached Vallabhbhai that Pratt was so angry with the letter that he threw it into the waste paper basket. Informed of the report, Gandhi, who was back in the villages of Champaran, where he was trying to spread education, cleanliness and sanitation, suggested that a reminder should go to Pratt. This too was ignored or consigned to the w.p.b. Vallabhbhai sent a third letter, again on Gandhi's advice, in which he repeated his points and added that if in ten days no reply was received the Sabha would advise the public that veth was illegal and that "under no circumstances should people submit to it".¹³⁴

An obviously infuriated Pratt now asked Patel to meet him, and named the date and the time when Vallabhbhai should call at his headquarters. Vallabhbhai's response to this, sent, as far as can be seen, on his own and without any consultation with Gandhi, was utterly unprecedented. He told Pratt that to him there appeared to be no point for discussion, but if there were any legal rulings suggesting that veth was legitimate, he would be glad to be informed of them. If, however, the Commissioner himself wanted to meet him, he would be glad, Patel wrote, to see him in the Sabha's office. The snub was calculated, not impulsive. It was meant to snip the Raj's prestige. And it was administered in the certain knowledge that, having disregarded two letters, Pratt was in no position to accuse Patel of rudeness. Gandhi, we may be certain, would have couched the response differently, but Vallabhbhai was being himself – alive to his self-respect, blunt, and sure of his ground. He waited ten days and then came out with a pamphlet asking the public to withhold veth. The pamphlet was circulated in villages throughout Gujarat, and several Gujarat Sabha volunteers also set out to educate the public. Veth did not die at once but it had been hit hard.

Meanwhile, in Champaran, Gandhi's satyagraha, his resolve to cling to his truth, was vindicated. The Raj had climbed down, and Gandhi had been allowed to conduct his inquiry. As a result, on November 29, 1917, a Champaran Agrarian Act came into force in Bihar, abolishing hated practices, and Sir Edward Gait, Lieutenant-Governor of the province, announced that he would stand firmly by it.

As 1917, a crucial year in Vallabhbhai's life, came to its end, he reflected on Gandhi's initiatives, in two of which he had had a part, and saw that Champaran, the Swaraj memorandum and the attack on veth formed an impressive record. Before the year ended, Vallabhbhai added to his own record. Plague had broken out in Ahmedabad. Schools and courts were closed and many left the city

but Vallabhbhai “stuck to his residence” in Bhadra and “refused to move out for personal safety”. Mavlankar has left a picture:

His was a familiar figure moving in the streets, getting the sewers cleaned and the plague-stricken areas disinfected. When friends argued, he simply looked at them, and his silence was more eloquent than his words. It appeared as if he wished to say: “I have undertaken the duty of the chairman of the sanitary committee, and how can I seek safety? To leave my post of duty would be a breach of faith with the public, and, also, how can I leave the conservancy staff to risk plague, and seek safety for myself?”¹³⁵

Also at the end of 1917, famine struck nearby villages. The Gujarat Sabha organized relief, Vallabhbhai taking an active part. Then, as the new year began, Vallabhbhai faced a demand on his life and will that he had never foreseen, all because of some peasants of his Kheda district. The district had seen “very little rain” in 1915, and the kharif crop had failed. The 1916 season was a little better, “but by no means good”. In 1917 the rain was excessive and cruelly capricious. First there were some damaging floods. In early October, “bright sunshine which heralded the end of the monsoon brought the peasants out into their fields to cut their staple grain crops of bajri and kodra”. However, on October 22, when these crops were lying in the fields to dry, “the rains returned for three torrential days. Instead of drying, the crops rotted.”¹³⁶

Kheda’s peasants had paid “new, higher rates” to the labourers harvesting their doomed crop, for agricultural wages had increased suddenly after “a decade of stability”. The ongoing First World War had raised other prices too, of kerosene, ironware, cloth and salt. Looking desperately for money to buy food for their families, the peasants pleaded with the Government to lower the land revenue demand, payable in December, but, deceived perhaps by the greenness of the countryside, the Raj’s officials rejected the plea. On top of everything, the plague that had hit Ahmedabad also attacked Kheda district, taking, in all, 18,067 lives in 1917 and 1918. To escape the disease, many Kheda peasants spent the 1917-18 winter “in flimsy huts in their fields”.¹³⁷

Two men took up the peasants’ cause – Mohanlal Pandya and Shankarlal Parikh, both from Kathlal village in Kapadvanj taluka in north Kheda. Dismissed in 1911 from Baroda state service for his belief in violence, and since then a social worker in Kathlal, Pandya had attended the Godhra meeting. So had Parikh. On their return to Kathlal in the first week of November, they saw that peasants were longing for suspension of land revenue. Gandhi’s emphasis on the role

of the peasants fresh in their minds, Pandya and Parikh at once prepared a petition for revenue suspension. Seeing the petition, some Patidar farmers remarked that it should be made for Kheda as a whole, not only for Kathlal. In mid-November Pandya and Parikh printed petition forms at Nadiad. Signatures flooded in. On November 20, petitions with a total of 22,000 signatures from Kheda were sent to the government in Bombay. The government's answer was that the Collector would deal with the matter.

Pandya and Parikh met the Collector; they also kept in touch with Gandhi, now back in Champaran; and they pressed the two Bombay Council members who belonged to Kheda, Vithalbhai and Gokuldas Parekh, to secure relief. Vithalbhai and Parekh collected evidence from 409 peasants, heard their distress described in "vivid yet unadorned language"¹³⁸ and on December 15 met the Collector, a Maharashtrian called V. K. Namjoshi, urging him to postpone revenue in the whole district for a year. On December 22 Namjoshi decided that half the revenue in 104 villages spread over four talukas should be postponed – a postponement, in effect, of only 7.4 per cent of the district's revenue – and circulated his decision to the four mamlatdars, or taluka chiefs, concerned. But what did the mamlatdars do? Hiding the fact that the Collector had agreed to suspend half the revenue in 34 villages of his taluka, the Mamlatdar of Kapadvanj sent, on January 1, 1918, the following circular to the talatis (village revenue collectors) of his taluka:

1. If the revenue has not been paid in seven days, the mukhis (village headmen) are to be reported by the talati. They will then be dismissed.
2. Peasants who refuse to pay will be liable to chothai (a fine amounting to a quarter of the revenue fixed).
3. Moveable property of those who do not pay is to be confiscated immediately.
4. Talatis must be firm in collection. Those who fail to collect will be punished.¹³⁹

Vali Baksh Adam Patel, the Mamlatdar who sent out this circular, wanted, of course, to prove that he was more loyal to the Raj than the Collector. And some talatis seemed determined to show that they were more loyal than Adam Patel. A first-hand account of their ways was given by Amritlal Thakkar of the Servants of India Society, who later devoted himself to untouchables and tribals. Thakkar, who had been invited to Kapadvanj by Pandya and Parikh, said in a letter to the *Times of India*:

I visited some ten villages and made a particularly full inquiry regarding the complaints against the talatis. [To pay revenue] one agriculturist had to sell his land. Another had to borrow money at

*75 per cent. Two untouchables were made to hold their toes for two hours and were released only when they promised to pay their revenue dues. These men were obliged to borrow at 37 1/2 per cent interest... One Muslim cultivator was compelled to marry off his 10-year-old daughter so as to borrow 15 rupees from his son-in-law to pay up his revenue dues.*¹⁴⁰

When Gokuldas Parekh referred in the Bombay Council to the behaviour of the talatis, Frederick Pratt replied that the people of Kheda were always complaining and that he had learnt to ignore them.¹⁴¹ Adam Patel and his talatis failed, however, in Kathlal. No one in Pandya's village paid any revenue. "All right," bargained Adam Patel, "pay only half the revenue." But the peasants of Kathlal did not. Without as yet calling it a satyagraha, they had commenced one.

By January 1 Gandhi was back in Ahmedabad, where his base was no longer in Kochrab: friends had enabled him to start a centre – he named it Satyagraha Ashram – on the banks of the Sabarmati river. At his instance, the Gujarat Sabha had urged the Bombay government to cancel land revenue in some cases and postpone it in others. After hearing Pandya and Parikh and other villagers from Kheda, Gandhi advised the Gujarat Sabha to ask the peasants to suspend payment, i.e., to defy the law, until a reply was received from Bombay. A group from the Sabha, he added, should call on Frederick Pratt and inform him of its stand.

Vallabhbhai convened the Sabha's executive committee at his house in Bhadra. Gandhi's proposal and its radical implications were discussed for eight continuous days. While kept informed of the deliberations, Gandhi did not join them. But he sent the committee two messages. One was that the peasants should not be asked to break the law unless the executive committee was unanimously in favour of such a course. Vallabhbhai, whose heart had "danced" at Gandhi's recommendation,¹⁴² tried to "persuade Gandhiji to be satisfied with majority vote" but Gandhi "insisted on unanimity".¹⁴³ Some nervous members raised "a number of legal objections" but after eight days all agreed except one, who, however, chose not to vote against the proposal.

Gandhi's other message – he called it a condition – was that at least one of the Sabha's members "should devote all his time to the campaign until it was completed".¹⁴⁴ He was prepared, said Gandhi, to lead the campaign, but only if accompanied by at least one of the Sabha's workers, who would also assume charge if Gandhi was called elsewhere. Though Gandhi did not mention any names, there is no doubt as to who he hoped would volunteer.

Wooing Vallabhbhai, Gandhi had made him the secretary of the Sabha's executive. Then, when word reached him in Champaran of

Vallabhbhai's end-December role in organising famine relief, Gandhi had sent him a congratulatory letter. He continued his courtship in the week or so that he now spent in Ahmedabad. As Mahadev Desai, 21 years younger than Vallabhbhai and enlisted by Gandhi in the summer of 1917, noted in his diary, Gandhi "pressed Vallabhbhai to dine with him in the morning every day, and heartily appreciated his refusal to remarry though his wife had died 12 years* ago and thus drew him into the orbit of his magnetic field."¹⁴⁵

Gandhi's words and gestures probably warmed Vallabhbhai's heart, and we have noted that it tingled at the prospect of Kheda's peasants asserting their self-respect. Yet giving all of himself to an anti-Raj struggle in the countryside until it was over was not a decision that Patel would allow his heart alone to make for him. Even on much lesser issues his practice was to inspect the ground before treading upon it. He knew that his answer would affect his future and that of his children, whom, for all his reserve, he loved deeply. "What else do I have apart from the happiness of you two?" he would say in 1924, in a rare expression of his imprisoned sentiment.¹⁴⁶ There was no question, for instance, of Mani, who was now with him in Ahmedabad, a pupil in the 'Government Girls' High School, or Dahya studying in England if he answered with a yes, and that was not the only dream that would die.

We lack knowledge of the contents of Vallabhbhai's fond dreams, but we may be certain that the strong, successful barrister, devoted to his children and other relatives, must have cherished – secretly, of course, for he was a proud man – large and rich hopes.** Now, all of a sudden, these hopes were in the balance, and what lay ahead was not a ground but unknown waters. Yet fond dreams did not take up all of his soul, which also held, as we have seen, a secret hunger. Perhaps he could appease some of it by working, at Gandhi's side, for his people, and he couldn't deny that for all his fashionably-cut clothes, he cared, indeed deeply, for Kheda's peasants. If Gandhi's call went deep into his soul, it also worked on Vallabhbhai's sense of chivalry, which was loth to deny help to an outsider offering to help Kheda.

And wasn't there a possibility, a wisp of a chance perhaps, that Gandhi might actually succeed? To Vallabhbhai, who had no heart "in the politics in vogue at the time", ¹⁴⁸ Gandhi's satyagraha must have seemed more promising and more honourable than petitioning or bomb-throwing. If Gandhi's method seemed attractive to Patel, so did the man, cranky no doubt, but also charming, and extraordinary, and

* This is not accurate. Jhaverba had died in 1909, nine years before the events under reference.

** According to Raojibhai Patel, a long-time associate, Vallabhbhai had "nurtured for years a plan of amassing great wealth".¹⁴⁷

shrewd, and, as far as Vallabhbhai could see, completely in control of himself. Vallabhbhai may have felt, too, recalling his experience of England, that the British, with their distaste for ruthlessness, might find it hard to cope with Gandhi's technique. Finally, the thought may have also crossed his mind that, if luck favoured Gandhi, he as Gandhi's lieutenant might have a role and a task more satisfying than a barrister's, if also perhaps more demanding, but more fulfilling for that very reason. Vallabhbhai was surely conscious, in early 1918, of great unused parts of himself. And if luck did not favour Gandhi? Given the Raj's power and the public's timidity, this was the more likely prospect. Wilderness and ridicule would then be his bitter fate. There was no scope, on this occasion, for a second string to his bow, an alternative plan on which to fall back. He would either find fulfilment or be found a fool.

He did not, however, decide on impulse. "I took to this life after mature consideration and not on the spur of the moment," he would say 11 years later.¹⁴⁹ Yet he had to decide quickly. Not that others were considering Gandhi's invitation. We know that "no one else was prepared".¹⁵⁰ But Gandhi, returning any day to Champaran, wanted a reply before leaving. Moreover, Kheda's peasants were pressing for a definite steer from the Gujarat Sabha,* which could not be given without an answer to Gandhi's stipulation. Vallabhbhai did not, as far as is known, consult anyone else, not Vithalbhai, not the Kanugas. Of the struggle in his soul or the debate in his mind no one had the slightest hint, and it is perfectly possible that neither the struggle nor the debate lasted more than a few hours. Six months later Gandhi would publicly, and in Vallabhbhai's presence, describe Vallabhbhai's short-lived conflict, an account probably based on what Vallabh had conveyed to him or Mahadev:

*Vallabhbhai told himself: "No doubt my practice is flourishing today. I am also doing something big in the municipality. But [the struggle for the peasants of Kheda] is bigger than that. My practice may or may not be there tomorrow. My money will be blown tomorrow; those who inherit my money will blow it. Let me leave them a higher legacy than money."*¹⁵²

Gandhi's hope was fulfilled. As Narhari Parikh – Vallabhbhai's friend and first biographer** – puts it: "Vallabhbhai offered his services, much to Gandhiji's delight."¹⁵³ Or, as Vallabhbhai's

* "On (January 9) some peasants came and recounted their sufferings at the hands of the revenue officials. The Gujarat Sabha leaders could no longer wash their hands of the affair."¹⁵⁷

** and younger brother of Shankarlal Parikh of Kathlal

daughter has said with equal terseness: "Mahatma Gandhi wanted somebody who would give up everything and devote all his time to the satyagraha campaign in Kheda....My father volunteered his services, and they were accepted."¹⁵⁴ Or, as Vallabhbhai would say himself: "Anyhow, I joined his army and went to Kheda for seven or eight months."¹⁵⁵

Thus did Vallabhbhai join Gandhi. He would recall in 1938: "When I joined Gandhiji, I collected some firewood, lit a fire and put all considerations of my family, my career, my reputation and everything into the fire. I do not know what would be left of all these except the ashes."¹⁵⁶ Vallabhbhai made his decision on January 9, 1918. Forty one years later, after India was free, Patel was no more and Abul Kalam Azad too was dead, a book written by Azad was published, *India Wins Freedom*, which gave another version of the birth of the Gandhi-Patel partnership:

*Sardar Patel was entirely the creation of Gandhiji.... He was one of the many lawyers of Gujarat with hardly any interest or place in the public life of the country. When Gandhiji settled in Ahmedabad, he picked out Patel and step by step built him up.... Patel owed everything to Gandhiji.*¹⁵⁷

The facts outlined above disprove the Maulana's thesis. Did Azad wholly believe it himself? Eight years before spelling it out, he had spoken of Vallabhbhai as one of India's "most precious jewels" and referred to the 1918 decision:

*He made his choice out of the two courses that come before a man, namely, would he live for his country or for himself. He chose his country.*¹⁵⁸

The Maulana was closer to the facts in December 1950 than in 1957, when he wrote *India Wins Freedom*. Another explanation of the start of the Patel-Gandhi partnership runs as follows:

*The news of Champaran... led Vallabhbhai to take the most momentous decision of his life. With his innate foresight he could perceive that here was the man who would be acclaimed by the masses.... This was [Patel's] opportunity to achieve his life's purpose and aim, by linking his future career with that of a popular hero.*¹⁵⁹

This view, too, is invalidated by the sequence of events. Both opinions, one belittling Vallabhbhai and the other crediting him with a shrewd reading of the future, are contradicted by the evidence that the initiative in the relationship came from Gandhi, not Patel. It was

Gandhi who needed and wanted Vallabhbhai. He did not create Vallabhbhai, and Patel did not use Gandhi for an ulterior "purpose and aim", or latch on to him. One resolute man, Gandhi, sought another, Vallabhbhai, and the latter responded. Had Gandhi not asked for help, Vallabhbhai, with his strong sense of self-respect, would not have gone about "linking his future career with that of a popular hero". Is it not possible, while conceding this, to hold that Vallabhbhai shrewdly seized the moment of great opportunity when, unsolicited, it came to him? Even this would be a distortion. All available evidence suggests that Vallabhbhai was responding to a need – Gandhi's and that of Kheda's peasants –, not to an opportunity. Thus he would say in 1925, referring to his enlistment, "I felt it was a crime to keep aloof from (the Mahatma)." ¹⁶⁰

Power may have been glimpsed by Vallabhbhai as a far-off possibility but it was not, in 1918, his "purpose and aim". He had, on the contrary, shown little interest in the politics of Congress or of the Bombay Council, or in the popularity of Tilak, "at the moment probably the most powerful man in India", as Secretary of State Montagu put it in May 1918. ¹⁶¹ Though Tilak evoked deep respect in Vallabhbhai, ¹⁶² Patel made no move towards him. Without persuasion Vallabhbhai would not even have joined the municipality. Considering, too, that Gandhi's future influence was a hard quantity to estimate in 1917-18, we have to conclude that it was courage rather than cleverness that lay behind Vallabhbhai's response. It was a throw, not a move. We must, however, also give Destiny its place. Would the partnership have come about if Vallabhbhai had preceded his brother to London, and settled earlier in a barrister's career? If either Vallabhbhai or Gandhi had not chosen Ahmedabad? If Mohanlal Pandya and Shankarlal Parikh had ignored the peasants of Kapadvanj and failed to confront Gandhi with Kheda? In the final reckoning, it was thanks to Providence that Patel and Gandhi found each other, and India found the two together.

1870

1. The first part of the report is devoted to a general description of the country, its position, its climate, its soil, its vegetation, its animals, and its people. The second part is devoted to a description of the principal cities, towns, and villages, and to a description of the principal industries, occupations, and professions. The third part is devoted to a description of the principal roads, canals, and railways, and to a description of the principal ports, harbors, and rivers. The fourth part is devoted to a description of the principal public buildings, churches, and schools, and to a description of the principal public institutions, hospitals, and prisons. The fifth part is devoted to a description of the principal public works, bridges, and fortifications, and to a description of the principal public services, police, fire, and health. The sixth part is devoted to a description of the principal public works, bridges, and fortifications, and to a description of the principal public services, police, fire, and health. The seventh part is devoted to a description of the principal public works, bridges, and fortifications, and to a description of the principal public services, police, fire, and health. The eighth part is devoted to a description of the principal public works, bridges, and fortifications, and to a description of the principal public services, police, fire, and health. The ninth part is devoted to a description of the principal public works, bridges, and fortifications, and to a description of the principal public services, police, fire, and health. The tenth part is devoted to a description of the principal public works, bridges, and fortifications, and to a description of the principal public services, police, fire, and health.

TWO
1918-22
LIEUTENANT



FREDERICK Greville Pratt again enters the story. Six years older than Vallabhbhai and the same age as Gandhi, he had joined the ICS after a spell at Oxford. His younger brother William later attained fame as the actor Boris Karloff. Early in his career, in 1900-1, Frederick Pratt had been Collector of Kheda. Fluent in Gujarati, convinced of the Raj's kindness to India's peasants, tough and resourceful, he was viewed in 1918 as "very clever and experienced".¹

Vallabhbhai, we saw, had snubbed him the previous December over veth, but that was not their only conflict. Each had had a candidate in mind for the Ahmedabad municipal engineer's job. The city board selected a man called Macassey, whom Pratt wanted, and not the Indian that Patel, as chairman of the sanitary committee, had recommended. Ahmedabad faced a serious water shortage shortly after Macassey's appointment, and on January 1, 1918 a Gujarat Sabha meeting, chaired by Gandhi, passed a resolution asking the government and the city board to do something. Receiving a copy of the resolution, Commissioner Pratt summoned Mavlankar and another secretary of the Sabha* and told them that he was not responsible for the city's water. "Go to the municipality," he said, "and beat the drum until the sound reaches its deaf ears. And if you still don't get water, burn the houses of councillors."² Mavlankar reported the remark to his colleague and neighbour, and repeated it, at Patel's instance, to Sir Ramanbhai, the municipal president, and Rao Saheb Harilalbhai, the chairman of the managing committee. For the sake of fairness Mavlankar added that Pratt's advice was "obviously not meant to be taken literally".³

Soon afterwards, Vallabhbhai, Macassey and an engineer that the Bombay government had sent down called Dyer made a tour of the city's water system. Pratt joined them. Wanting to make a suggestion, Patel had only said, "The best thing may be to -", when Pratt

* Vallabhbhai was secretary of the Sabha's executive, the other two secretaries of the Sabha as a whole.

interrupted him. "The best way, Mr. Patel," said Pratt, "is for your committee to cooperate with the municipal engineer." Pratt now got the retort he had asked for. It also finished poor Macassey. Said Vallabhbhai:

*The best way is to relieve Macassey. Is there anything he wants that my committee has not done? Ask him. Yet when the secretaries of the Gujarat Sabha waited on you, you asked them to burn our houses. Why our houses? Why not burn the bungalow of this fellow here who is at the root of the trouble?*⁴

We can once again see the ruthlessness of Patel's speech. Once more it is calculated. Vallabhbhai's defences are prepared – as the intelligent Pratt suspects, Ramanbhai and Harilalbhai have been informed. Unable to deny the charge, Pratt pockets the rebuke, and Macassey resigns.

The Gujarat Sabha sent its advice to Kheda's peasants on January 10. That day Gandhi left for Bihar. The next day the Sabha's secretaries, Mavlankar and Krishnalal Desai, met Pratt. Patel and a few others had gone along with Mavlankar and Desai, but Pratt declined to see anyone other than "the two who had the appointment".⁵ He was probably returning Vallabhbhai's hit over Macassey.

Pratt: *You young politicians have published this notice. Do you realise what it involves?* Desai: *Yes. We are fully conscious of it.* P.: *Have you had it distributed?* Mavlankar: *Yes. They were distributed in the district yesterday.*

P.: *May I ask how old you are?* M.: *Thirty years.* P.: *You are still immature and inexperienced. You have probably issued this notice without the knowledge of your president (Gandhi).* M.: *It was published at his instance.* D.: *In fact he drafted it.* P.: *I am sorry to hear this.*

After more exchanges in this vein Pratt asked Mavlankar and Desai to "give further and fuller consideration to the implications" of the Sabha's advice and asked for "the final decision by tomorrow evening".

D.: *There is no need to give further thought. And even if we were prepared to do so, you are not giving us time. Our president is at the moment in Bihar.* P.: *I did not know that your leader was wandering about all over India. However, that is not my concern.* M.: *To reconsider this matter we would have to call our executive committee, and that would not be possible in so short a time.*

*P.: That is not my business. If I do not hear by tomorrow from you, I shall write to the Government recommending that your Sabha should be declared illegal.*⁶

The Sabha did not revise its stand and the Raj did not ban the Sabha, but on January 16 the Government of Bombay issued a statement that ruled out further suspension of revenue and warned those refusing to pay that they would be punished. The statement ended by saying that the Governor, Lord Willingdon,

*cannot allow the revenue collection of Government in this rich and prosperous district to be interfered with by political agitation which has undoubtedly been instigated and in the main carried out from outside the district.*⁷

This was wrong. The “instigation” had come from Pandya and Shankarlal. Moreover, nine of the Sabha’s executive belonged to Kheda; they weren’t outsiders. On February 4, Gandhi, back in western India, said in Bombay that to practise satyagraha was “the true kshatriya dharma or the duty of the warrior”⁸ – he clearly had the Patidars of Kheda in mind. Accompanied by Vithalbhai and Gokuldas Parekh, Kheda’s two councillors, he called on the Governor. Willingdon was urged to appoint an independent committee of inquiry, but he was not willing. Pratt, whom Gandhi engaged in correspondence, refused to budge either.

However, Pratt sought and obtained Gandhi’s help in Ahmedabad, where Gandhi had returned on February 6. Workers in the city’s textile mills were set on a wage increase and the owners ready to declare a lockout. At Pratt’s instance, the Collector of Ahmedabad wrote to Gandhi: “I am informed that the millowners will, if at all, only heed your advice; you are sympathetic to them, and you are the only person who can explain their case to me.”⁹ There was some truth in this. Gandhi not only knew the leading millowner, Ambalal Sarabhai, well; it was Ambalal who, in late 1915 or early 1916, had quietly come to Gandhi’s ashram (then in Kochrab), “placed currency notes of the value of Rs.13,000” in Gandhi’s hands and driven off, just when Gandhi was in serious anxiety about the ashram’s monetary plight.¹⁰

But Gandhi was close also to the workers and their two leaders, one of whom was none other than Ambalal’s sister Anasuya and the other a man called Shankerlal Banker. On Gandhi’s advice, both sides referred the question to a tribunal headed by the Collector. On it were three millowners – Ambalal and two others –, and three workers’ representatives, Gandhi, Shankerlal – and Patel! Vallabhbhai – who, as we saw, had met Ambalal in London in 1912 – could not have foreseen that assisting Gandhi over Kheda would also mean helping

resolve an industrial dispute, but he joined the tribunal anyway. It never sat. Some workers went prematurely on strike, whereupon Ambalal and the other owners left the tribunal and announced that workers unwilling to accept a 20 per cent increase could leave.

Backed by Gandhi and Vallabhbhai, the workers refused to accept these terms. While the owners considered their next step, Gandhi and Patel pondered Kheda. Vithalbhai and Parekh came from Bombay and "argued with passion against any unconstitutional action"¹¹ but Gandhi and Vallabhbhai were unconvinced, and Gandhi declared that "he was not prepared to let the government call the peasants liars".¹² Those agreeing with him, said Gandhi, should accompany him the next day to Nadiad, from where they would go into the villages to see who was telling the truth.¹³ The next afternoon, February 16, a number joined Gandhi and Vallabhbhai at the station. At Nadiad Gandhi split the thirty who had assembled into groups, and asked each group to inspect fifty villages by March 10. Facts obtained would determine the next step. One of the thirty, Raojibhai Patel, who had worked with Gandhi in South Africa, later wrote the following account.

On arrival at the place of Gokaldas Talati in Nadiad, I found a number of Ahmedabad lawyers sitting or pacing on the second floor of the house. I did not know any of them. After bowing before Gandhiji I sat down next to him. He introduced me to everyone...

Pointing to a man seated near the door, he said to me, "That is Vallabhbhai Patel. He is unshakable." I was seeing him for the first time. Dressed in coat-trousers-and-necktie, he looked haughty and unconcerned. [However,] I was delighted when told that I would join Vallabhbhai's group.

Next morning Vallabhbhai was no longer in coat-trousers-and-necktie. To me he looked becoming in his Bangalore cap, half-coat of black wool and soft fine dhoti.

We sat in a bullock-cart. But the cart-driver had forgotten to tie the platform on which we were sitting to the cart. The bullocks moved at a clip and the platform slid backwards until it tipped over. Vallabhbhai and I found ourselves on the ground with the platform on top of us!

*That day we studied five villages in Nadiad taluka. All the village headmen recognized Vallabhbhai. I discovered that Vallabhbhai had a way with peasants and the skill to elicit facts from them...*¹⁴

The bullock-cart journey was an exception, the inquiry involving, in the main, long walks inside and between villages. Patel and Gandhi had separately done about 30 villages each when, on February 22, word came from Ahmedabad that the owners had started a lockout

and announced that only those agreeing to accept a 20 per cent increase would be invited back. Leaving Vallabhbhai in charge of Kheda, Gandhi rushed to the workers of Ahmedabad.

* * *

We live a slice of Patel's life if we look at Gandhi's doings – Vallabhbhai was always watching him. Thousands of Ahmedabad's workers took a pledge, in Gandhi's presence, that they would neither resume work unless they were given a 35 per cent increase nor damage or abuse any property or person. Gandhi, Anasuya and Shankerlal were daily in the workers' midst. Every morning Gandhi would address several thousand locked-out workers from under a babul tree outside the Shahpur Gate, Anasuya bringing him there in her American car, a 1915 model Overland; and almost daily a leaflet, signed by Anasuya but often written by Gandhi, would exhort them to unity, or coach them in discipline or point out that they could now clean and repair their houses, read if they could, learn subsidiary skills and try to survive by doing labour below their caste.

The workers didn't have a union. No agency gave them even an anna a day. Counter leaflets appeared saying the owners would never yield. Yet for almost a month the workers did not flag. Ambalal would on occasion come to Gandhi's Ashram for a meal; with a chuckle Gandhi would have Anasuya serve her brother. But on the dispute Ambalal remained "the most stubborn opponent".¹⁵ Gandhi's appeal to him to "look deep into your heart, listen to the still small voice within and obey it"¹⁶ led to no change. The owners escalated the conflict on March 12, ending the lockout and inviting workers willing to come on a 20 per cent increase. "From now on it is a strike," said Gandhi. It was Ahmedabad's first.

Two days later, Chhaganlal, a member of Gandhi's Ashram, was taunted when he visited a chawl: "What is it to Anasuyabehn and Gandhiji? They come and go in their car, they eat elegant food while we suffer death agonies. To attend meetings does not keep us from starving."¹⁷ Chhaganlal informed Gandhi. Next day, when Gandhi sat again under the babul tree, he saw "a thousand disappointed faces" rather than "the five thousand or more, beaming with self-determination" of earlier days. Realizing that the workers might start to capitulate within hours, Gandhi quietly said: "I cannot tolerate for a minute that you break your pledge. I shall not take any food, nor use a car till you get a 35 per cent increase."¹⁸

Recovering from the shock they had received, Anasuya and several workers said they would fast too but were firmly told that fasting was his business, not theirs. The rest, including those who

had taunted Chhaganlal, swore that they would keep their pledge and do substitute work, be it ever so menial. Concerned for Gandhi but also angry, Ambalal went to Gandhi's Ashram, sat beside the fasting figure and burst out: "This is between the owners and the workers. Where does *your* life come in?" Then Ambalal made the point that the millowners, too, had a pledge to keep: they had sworn to give no more than 20 per cent.

Yet no one could now question the spirit or solidarity of the workmen. Even otherwise, Gandhi's fast, his first in India, had to be heeded: the millowners could not have faced their relatives or themselves if they had ignored the fasting Gandhi. "For *your* sake and for *this* time" Gandhi was offered anything he wanted, but he turned that down and asked instead for a "just" settlement. After four days an ingenious but honourable solution was found. First the millowners would revert to a commitment they had given up and accept an arbitrator. The workers would resume work and get a 35 per cent increase on the first day, thus redeeming their pledge. For the next day, however, in order to do justice to the owners' pledge, they would accept a 20 per cent increase. From the third day they would get a 27 1/2 per cent increase which would be adjusted against the award of the arbitrator, Principal Anandshankar Dhruva.¹⁹

While uneasy at having coerced Ambalal and the other millowners, Gandhi could nonetheless point to two gains: firstly, "there was so little ill will or bitterness" during the struggle, and, secondly, the owners had agreed to a permanent machinery of arbitration. When, on March 19, Gandhi broke his fast before a hushed crowd, one of the men who asked to speak after him was Frederick Pratt: "As long as they followed Gandhi Saheb's advice, they would fare well and secure justice," said Pratt.²⁰ In the wake of the fast came the launching of the Ahmedabad Textile Labour Association, Gujarat's first union. Shortly afterwards, Principal Dhruva awarded 35 per cent.

Though holding the Kheda baby, Vallabhbhai visited Ahmedabad for some of these events, and was present when the agreement was reached. In later years he would speak of the struggle's "sacred" memory, and of "the new blood infused into the labour movement" by the arbitration inaugurated in Ahmedabad in 1918.²¹

* * *

Gandhi was ready now for Kheda. On March 20, the day after his fast ended, he urged Pratt – "my one last request"²² – to postpone collection of the second instalment of revenue. Between December and now Pratt's subordinates had exacted the first instalment – by threatening the seizure and sale of moveables, crops and land and in some cases by actually confiscating ornaments and crops. Pratt's reply to Gandhi's plea was that orders to collect the second instalment had already been issued. On March 22, therefore,

“at a big meeting” of peasants in Nadiad, ²³ the Kheda struggle was launched.

Earlier, the facts emerging from the first ten days of the Kheda survey had satisfied Vallabhbhai and Gandhi that the peasants’ case was genuine. After a talk with Pratt, Gandhi wrote him a strong letter on February 27:

*You desire to do good, but you rule not by right of love, but by the force of fear.... The only dignified course for them (the Kheda peasants) is to show disapproval by disobeying your orders.*²⁴

Did Pratt wish to retort that there was no guarantee that officials and politicians in an India run by Indians would “rule by right of love” and not by “force of fear”? May be not, for neither “independence” nor “swaraj” was yet a word that Gandhi or Patel was freely using. To Mavlankar and Desai, Gandhi had no doubt written that “it is only by that method (satyagraha) that you will achieve independence”;²⁵ but during this period, and in fact right until 1920, this expression came rarely to the lips of Gandhi, still a “loyalist” desiring for India nothing beyond an equal and honoured place within the British empire. Another point, instead, was made by Pratt, who wanted “peace” and “justice” in Ahmedabad but “law” in the countryside. He said to Gandhi: “In India, to defy the law of revenue is to take a step which would destroy all administration. To break this law, therefore, is different from breaking all other laws.”²⁶

Four thousand attended the Nadiad meeting of March 22, surrounded by a green countryside. Said Gandhi:

The agriculturists of this district are both clever and industrious. They have created for themselves a lovely orchard. Nevertheless, it does not follow that they must be called upon to pay land revenue even though their crops have failed.... If the crop fails, it is intolerable that the Government should forcibly recover assessment.

That people would tell lies for the sake of saving at most a year’s interest – for they are asking only for a postponement of assessment – is inconceivable. It is an insult to all of us that the Government dares to make this accusation.

We should declare plainly that we shall not pay land revenue and will be prepared to take the consequences.

We must visualize that the Government may... sell our cattle, our movable property, confiscate lands and even put people in jail on the ground that they are not law-abiding.

*I cannot bear to think that people will break their pledge after making it. It would cause me very great pain indeed if you take a pledge which you do not mean to keep.*²⁷

Narhari Parikh saw that it was “an inspiring and rousing speech”.²⁸ That Gandhi had been on a fast only three days earlier added to its power. At the end Gandhi asked the peasants whether they were ready for suffering. There was a long silence. Then voices said, “Yes,” after which Gandhi read out a vow which “only those in deadly earnest were to sign”.²⁹ It spoke of refusal to pay and the readiness to face consequences. It also spoke of the willingness to pay up of those who could afford to, provided the rest were allowed to wait a year. And it explained why, in the absence of a general postponement, “the well-to-do amongst us would not pay”: if they did, “the needy ones would, out of fright, sell their chattels or incur debts and pay the revenue and thus suffer.”³⁰ That day over 200 Kheda peasants signed the pledge.

A practice which would be only rarely broken commenced at this Nadiad occasion. Vallabhbhai did not speak at it; as long as Gandhi was there to speak, Patel would only sit near him, adding nothing of his own. He would speak in Gandhi’s absence, and then nobody else would add to his remarks.³¹ Gandhi having gone to a conference in Indore, Vallabhbhai spoke on March 30 at another “big meeting” of Kheda’s peasants, also held at Nadiad – his Nadiad, where he was born and had spent six years studying for his matric and for the pleaders’ test. That test he had passed 18 years earlier. Since then he had returned often enough to Nadiad but this was his first public speech to his people. While excited by the struggle against the Raj, the Chhagam people were also wondering what their Vallabh – their Barrister Vallabhbhai –, seen until the other day in smart European clothes, now suddenly wearing Indian and absenting himself from courtrooms, was getting involved in. He left them in no doubt:

This fight will act as a spark which will set the whole country afire. Happiness cannot be obtained without undergoing trials and tribulations, and if perchance you get happiness easily, it does not last very long.

The government has granted postponement of Rs. 1³/₄ lakhs out of a total assessment of Rs. 23 lakhs. [Of the balance] the first instalment has been almost fully paid. It might be thought that if we collected [what remains] from Bombay or from Gujarat and paid it to the government the people would be saved much hardship.

*The brave man who has inspired this fight is capable of converting the cowardly into the bravest of persons. However, in India there is a district called Kheda which is the land of brave men. They will not think of receiving assistance in this manner.*³²

Two of Vallabhbhai's future colleagues, Rajendra Prasad and Jivatram Kripalani, both of whom had worked with Gandhi in Champaran, travelled all the way from Bihar to see what was happening in Kheda. Kripalani, who had met Vallabhbhai three months earlier at Ahmedabad, noticed Vallabhbhai's change, exterior and interior, and afterwards wrote about it:

When I first met the Sardar he had just come under the spell of the personality of Gandhiji. He was living in a style then considered appropriate for a fashionable and young barrister. He soon left Ahmedabad to participate in the peasant satyagraha in Kheda...

After some time I followed the Sardar there. What I saw of his life then was a revelation to me! He had cast off his foreign dress and along with it the comfortable life he had led before. He lived with the workers, sharing the plain food, sleeping on the ground, doing everything for himself, including the daily washing of his clothes, and walking long distances in the villages.... He was his usual self, full of fun and laughter. He entertained his new companions with his dry humour.

It appeared that he was finding his fulfilment in the new life he had chosen for himself. His whole attention was focussed upon the success of the struggle which he had made his own.

The same phenomenon I witnessed again and again in the life of many of our leaders. As soon as they had joined the fight for freedom, they seemed to have left their old life behind, never to be resumed. They were, as it were, born again as Indians.³³

* * *

Pratt and his men were not idle. While Gandhi was in Indore, the land of some non-paying peasants of Vadtal was confiscated. When the peasants persisted in their refusal to pay, their movables were seized and sold. Gandhi, who soon returned, and Vallabhbhai responded by jointly visiting scores of villages. Narhari Parikh, who was with them, saw that Patel

spoke seldom. He observed carefully the way in which Gandhiji carried on his correspondence with officials and conducted his discussions with them; the way in which he kept up the morale of the people and tested their mettle; and noted the way in which at the height of the campaign Gandhiji watched for an opportunity to secure a settlement.³⁴

Not surprisingly, Karamsad was one of the villages Gandhi and Vallabhbhai covered. There, on April 4, Gandhi paid a significant tribute, warm and substantial but not fulsome, to his associate:

*This is Vallabhbhai's soil. He has been through the fire but further tests await him. I have no doubt that in the end we shall find pure gold.*³⁵

A young Scotsman, James Ker, had been named Namjoshi's successor as Collector of Kheda, but Pratt and Governor Willingdon felt that someone of greater experience was needed to meet the peasants' challenge. Jyotsnanath Ghosal, who had been Collector of Kheda from 1913 to 1917, was therefore summoned.³⁶ Ghosal thought in early April that the threat of land confiscations had broken the movement, but by the middle of the month 2,337 people had signed the vow, and Ghosal admitted to a reporter of the *Bombay Chronicle* that "he had never known such solidarity".³⁷

By this time Pratt had made his next move. With a straight face he requested Gandhi "for assistance in calling the people of the district together so that he (Pratt) could speak to them".³⁸ Gandhi "immediately issued a circular asking the people to listen to the Commissioner". On April 12, accordingly, some 2,000 peasants, most of them better off than the majority in the district, heard Pratt at Nadiad. Gandhi was not present but Vallabhbhai and other workers were. Pratt used the prefix "Mahatma" for Gandhi and the suffix "Saheb" for Vallabhbhai. His Gujarati was excellent and his meaning plain:

I would like you to listen to me attentively and repeat to everybody what I say. You have been given much advice by Mahatma Gandhi and Vallabhbhai Saheb. They have made speeches from village to village but today I would request you to listen to me.

The agriculturists have no legal right to demand postponement of assessment. That is entirely within our gift. Your fight will be in vain. It is not merely my order but that of Lord Willingdon. I have in my possession his letter (and here Pratt displayed a document) which says that he will accept whatever order I will pass.

If you continue this fight against the Government it will be you who will have to bear the consequences, not these gentlemen (here Pratt pointed to the volunteers who had come to Kheda). They are not the people who will go to jail.

I have 28 years of experience of land revenue law. Mahatma Gandhi is my friend [but] he has spent the greater part of his life in Africa. He is well-versed in religion but in matters

concerning land and land revenue he knows very little. I know far more.

I shall be sorry to see the lands of good Patidars confiscated. The benevolent government is giving you this final opportunity.

Do not think our mamlatdars and talatis will collect money by seizing and selling your [movable] property. They will not take so much trouble. Their time is very valuable. They will not go to anyone's house to collect the money. Your land will be confiscated.

Let me tell you one thing in conclusion. If you break a pledge that was mistakenly made, no one can say that you have sinned. I will tell you what happened in Ahmedabad. There was a struggle recently between millowners and mill hands. The latter had taken an oath that they would not go back to work until they got an increase of 35 per cent. But what happened in the end? When they realized that their pledge was not reasonable and they could not adhere to it, they broke it and accepted 27 1/2 per cent and resumed work.

I have said whatever I had to say, and now the final decision rests in your hands. To a saint it does not matter what happens to his property, but please remember that you are not saints.³⁹

It was a clever performance in a setting designed to awe the peasants. The Collector was in attendance, as were other district officials. A simple farmer from Karamsad, however, got up and said: "This movement is not designed to trouble the government; but if we who are rich pay up, the poor would be compelled to borrow in order to pay up also." Pratt asked the farmer if this didn't mean that they were fighting the government. Admitting that it was a fight, and that Gandhi had described it as such, the farmer looked towards Vallabhbhai, who then stood up.

Vallabhbhai: *This agriculturist also says that this is his fight, but that does not mean that he is fighting just to harass the government.*
 Pratt (to Vallabhbhai): *Do you intend to make a speech?* V.: *Not really, but I would like to comment on what you said about the mill hands of Ahmedabad.* P.: *Certainly, you may speak, but today it is my say and so speak in my favour.*

Picking up an arrow Pratt had shot, Vallabhbhai adroitly hurled it back at him. He told the gathering:

The Commissioner has told you about the pledge which the workers of Ahmedabad took. I was one of those who intervened in that

dispute. It is not correct to say that the mill workers were forced to break their pledge. Right from the outset it had been decided that if the millowners accepted arbitration, the workers would accept whatever increase the arbitrators considered reasonable, and resume work.

The arbitrator was appointed. On the first day the workers received 35 per cent. Thereafter they accepted 27 1/2 per cent on the understanding that there would be an adjustment later, based on the arbitrator's award.

When this settlement was reached, our Commissioner was also present. In that meeting the Commissioner told the workers: "Gandhiji will give you right advice. If you follow it you will do well and get justice." I am telling you the same.⁴⁰

It was not lost on Pratt or the peasants that he had addressed them through Gandhi's good offices, and the fact that from the meeting they all trooped off to see the Mahatma could not have pleased the Commissioner. He sent Gandhi a letter "full of grief, anger and irritation"—at least that is how Mahadev Desai, the Mahatma's secretary, summed it up.⁴¹ Gandhi was delighted that "the peasants could not be overawed in the face of the Commissioner himself"⁴² and Vallabhbhai had reason to be pleased with his own impromptu role. Gandhi was prepared also to acknowledge the boldness behind Pratt's bid, but there is no record of Patel's comment on it. Englishmen like Pratt, the Mahatma told Patel and Desai, "never suffer under a sense of helplessness; it is we who do. I have never seen an Englishman worrying over what would happen to him the next day."⁴³

Yet Pratt's threats angered Vallabhbhai and Gandhi, and the latter agreed with Patel that "we can certainly tell the Kheda peasants that through our local struggle we are fighting for Swaraj for the whole of India". The Mahatma went on to declare to Vallabhbhai and Desai that "the first act of our Swaraj Parliament will be to restore the confiscated lands to the peasants". In the event, the expression "Swaraj" was not used in Kheda, but Gandhi issued a reply to Pratt's confiscation threat in which he said that "if such gross injustice is possible in the British Empire, I would unhesitatingly become a law resister".⁴⁵

Not only did Pratt not carry out his threat. He yielded. On April 24 he ordered cancellation of chothai fines and of the very few notices of confiscation of land that had actually been issued. At his instance the Collector told the mamlatdars that for recovering revenue only movables could be seized, not land, and that those who were unable to pay revenue were not to be compelled. The

struggle would have been called off if Pratt's orders had become known, but they were kept secret to prevent an impression of capitulation.⁴⁶

The volte face was not Pratt's own decision. His hand was forced by the Viceroy, Lord Chelmsford, who was reluctant to alienate Gandhi. Unlike Tilak and Annie Besant, Gandhi was prepared to support the war effort. As he told Chelmsford, he wanted India to give "ungrudging and unequivocal support to the Empire... in the hour of its danger" because of "the expectation that our goal – 'to be partners of the Empire in the same sense as the Dominions overseas' – will be reached all the more speedily on that account."⁴⁷ Wanting the Mahatma's presence at a conference he had convened in New Delhi for assisting the war effort – Tilak and Mrs Besant were not invited –, the Viceroy sought to discourage extreme steps against the Kheda rebels. Word went to Bombay, and thence to Commissioner Pratt, that Gandhi should not be pushed too hard.

The war conference, Gandhi taking part, was held from April 26 to 28. In a single-sentence speech, uttered deliberately in Hindustani, Gandhi expressed support for the war effort. Privately, he asked Chelmsford for "relief regarding the Kaira trouble"⁴⁸ and also for the release of the brothers Muhammad Ali and Shaukat Ali, popular Muslim leaders detained for their alleged sympathy with Turkey, a war partner of England's foe, Germany. Peasant power and a Hindu-Muslim alliance had become part of Gandhi's strategy by April 1918. The Viceroy turned down the demand regarding the Ali brothers and kept silent on the peasants.

Returning to Kheda, Gandhi noticed that though cattle, ornaments and utensils were being increasingly seized, land was not being confiscated. By May 12, though unaware yet of Pratt's April 24 orders, he had scented success. At a meeting in a village in Borsad taluka he claimed that

*although we have not achieved complete victory, we have nevertheless won. Mr Pratt has not been able to carry out his threat regarding confiscation of land.*⁴⁹

The peasants' morale was striking. By early May, 3,200 of them had signed the pledge. Supported by their womenfolk, they refused to pay revenue; it had to be extorted. Vallabhbhai's presence and occasional words were helping. In the Patidar-dominated village of Ras in Borsad taluka, he spoke along with Gandhi. Mahadev Desai wrote in his diary:

*Ras. The beautiful scenery and the big maidan, which looked like a natural open-air theatre, was a pleasant surprise to Bapu. Wonderful speech.*⁵⁰

Desai's reference was to Gandhi's talk, but Shankarlal Parikh, who with Pandya had "instigated" Kheda, noted Vallabhbhai's "extremely effective speech" at Ras. When, in May, Gandhi again left Kheda, this time for Bihar, Vallabhbhai guided the district with pamphlets. In one of them he said:

A bitter war is on. In order to give the peasants as much trouble as possible, [the officials] took charge of milk-giving buffaloes and kept them in the sun. They separated them from their little calves. This reduced the price of buffaloes by half. Even so the peasants kept their pledge and bore their hardship. Women found it difficult to be eye-witnesses to [the suffering of] their carefully-tended cattle but showed great courage.

If the Government oversteps the limits, is itself angered, and harasses us, we for our part should not be impolite or lose our temper but commiserate rather than be angry.... The stiffer the opponent the more should our affection go out to him. That is the significance of satyagraha.⁵¹

Obedience to these injunctions was substantial but not complete. A mamlatdar who had seized some buffaloes was beaten by women and children in Khandali village in Matar taluka, and their menfolk set the confiscated animals free later in the night. This incident and cases of verbal abuse troubled Gandhi, who wondered at times whether the Kheda peasants had fully understood his "peaceful war".⁵² Vallabhbhai, on his part, saw these instances as aberrations and pointed to the restraint that, on balance, Kheda's peasants had shown. Moreover, it was with delight rather than regret that he noted that junior officials previously "obtaining whatever they wanted free of cost" from villagers were "unable now to get anything even on payment".⁵³ Gandhi's reaction would have been different.

Pratt's April 24 instructions that impoverished peasants were to be let off were not only not disclosed to Gandhi and Vallabhbhai; several mamlatdars were unwilling to implement them. On June 3, however, the Mamlatdar of Nadiad showed Gandhi the text of the Collector's new order. Realizing at once that he had won his point – the vow had said that if the impoverished were allowed to wait for a year the rest would pay up –, Gandhi immediately wrote to Ker to find out if the order applied to the whole of Kheda. When Ker replied that it did, Gandhi and Vallabhbhai jointly issued a pamphlet on June 6 stating that the battle was over:

The fight has come to an end.... If the public had been informed about the orders, which are said to have been issued on 25th of April, many could have been spared the hardships they had

*to undergo Nevertheless we welcome the settlement. Now only 8 per cent of the revenue remains to be recovered. Until today it was a matter of honour not to pay up the land revenue; now it will be a matter of honour to pay it up. Whoever has the means to pay should do so.*⁵⁴

Collector Ker claimed in a report to Pratt that the movement "had been for all practical purposes a failure".⁵⁵ In justification Ker cited the 92 per cent "recovery". Yet to force money out was wholly different from collecting tax, and it is a fairer appraisal to regard the six-month-long solidarity of the Kheda peasantry as a setback for the Raj and a triumph for Gandhi and Vallabhbhai.

In one of his letters to Pratt, Gandhi had written that "a new order of things" lay "largely in the hands of civil servants like yourself, more than those of the King's representatives quite at the top".⁵⁶ In fact, it lay even more in the hands of a mamlatdar, as was confirmed by another incident that now took place, the last in our survey of the Kheda story. A peasant in Navagam village in Matar taluka was served an order confiscating the onion crop growing on one of his fields. Gandhi, a lawyer and not merely the founder of satyagraha, noticed that the order did not say which field and was therefore defective. While Gandhi pointed this out to Collector Ker, Mohanlal Pandya pointed to the monsoon clouds that were about to break and, with the help of friends, started to dig the onions out. The Mamlatdar of Matar taluka – the one who had been beaten – entered the field, arrested Pandya and four others on a charge of theft, and took possession of the onions. After a trial, Pandya and two others were sentenced to 20 days in jail and the remaining two to ten days. Vallabhbhai and Gandhi were present when Pandya and his friends were tried but they chose not to cross-examine the witnesses or contest the charge. Gandhi told the large crowd that had gathered outside the courtroom:

*Any independent magistrate who had any knowledge of law would at once see that this was not a case of theft at all. Nevertheless, we shall not appeal. A satyagrahi should not appeal.*⁵⁷

Pandya and his four associates were Gujarat's first satyagraha prisoners. Gandhi, Vallabhbhai and others walked seven miles to welcome them when they came out of jail, and there was affection and honour in the title that Kheda gave to Mohanlal Pandya: "Dungri Chor", or "Onion Thief".

Kheda's peasants celebrated victory on June 29. Said Gandhi on the occasion:

A leader's skill is judged by his competence in selecting his assistants. Many were prepared to follow me, but I could not make up my mind as to who should be my deputy commander. Then I thought of Vallabhbhai. I must admit that when I first met Vallabhbhai, I could not help wondering who this haughty person was, and whether he would be able to do what I wanted.... If it were not for his assistance, this campaign could not have been carried through so successfully.

Vallabhbhai also spoke:

Following India's old custom, Mahatmaji has handed to me [the tribute] offered to him. If truth be told, I have done nothing.... Let me say, on behalf of my colleagues, that we would have accomplished nothing in this struggle if Kheda's people had not themselves shown courage and forbearance.⁵⁸

* * *

Putting it very broadly, Kheda saw Gandhi as a saint and Vallabhbhai, the son of the soil, as a hero. Gandhi's astute mind was not unnoticed, and Vallabhbhai's selflessness in a deputy's role was also observed. Essentially, however, it was as a saint-and-hero team that the Mahatma and Patel were imprinted on the minds of the people of Kheda, and of Gujarat as a whole. Also, what he saw of Gandhi in Kheda and Ahmedabad caused Patel himself to regard the Mahatma as a person of exceptional character. Not that Vallabhbhai was slow to recognize Gandhi's keen tactical and strategic sense, or that he agreed with everything Gandhi did or said at this juncture: we have noted a difference in outlook between the two.

Yet Champaran's impact had been strengthened by Patel's personal experience of Gandhi's affection, his toughness, his readiness to suffer, his humour, his self-control. Though angered like Vallabhbhai by Pratt, and not yielding to Vallabhbhai in the readiness to fight him, Gandhi could treat Pratt with courtesy and recognize his qualities. Patel envied Gandhi for doing what he himself was unable to do. Likewise, Patel watched how in Kheda the Mahatma listened patiently to a stream of callers, answered with equal patience his numerous correspondents and involved himself in virtually every aspect of a village's life: its cleanliness or lack of it, the condition of its women and its untouchables, "its educational needs" and the manner in which villagers "used their spare time".⁵⁹

Vallabhbhai was struck, too, by the restraint and discipline that Gandhi was able to instil into the workers of Ahmedabad and the

peasants of Kheda. As we saw, he said of Gandhi that "he was capable of converting the cowardly into the bravest". In that "extremely effective" speech at Ras, Vallabhbhai had said that the village "had been made holy" by Gandhiji's arrival.⁶⁰ Coming from one whose speech was never flowery, the expressions indicate the opinion he had formed of the Mahatma. As for Gandhi's method, no one before had asked peasants to defy the Raj; and no previous rebel wanted his army to be polite and peaceful towards the enemy.

The concept was breathtaking in its novelty. Even if not wholly realizable, it uplifted participants and confused opponents. Satyagraha also appealed to Patel because it banished all sense of Indian inferiority – moral or of any other kind – and enabled the Indian peasant to look his English ruler in the eye. And it had worked – in Champaran, Ahmedabad and Kheda – as nothing else had done. The satyagrahas in Champaran and Kheda and the fast in Ahmedabad were more than expressions of courage; they were a door out of a trap, a clearing suddenly found in a jungle, an answer to the sigh, "But what can we do?" Finally, spotting in Collector Ker's order to the mamlatdars an opportunity to end the peasants' struggle, Gandhi had also shown that he knew when to end a battle, not merely when to start it.

To Vallabhbhai, Gandhi thus seemed to be three men in one, a saint, warrior and guide whom he could trust and follow. Having joined Gandhi some months earlier, Patel now decided to obey him. "Living with him convinced me that India's salvation lay only in treading the path shown by him," he would say three years later – "living with him" is a key phrase. And in 1929, after referring to an "instruction of Gandhiji", he would claim, "When it comes to obeying an order, there is no soldier like me."⁶¹ We may note, finally, that Vallabhbhai's decision to obey the Mahatma loyally was probably also influenced by the Hindu tradition, emphasized by Motakaka's Swaminarayan sect, of loyalty to the guru* – and perhaps by a realization that any power secured by Gandhi would devolve on his closest lieutenants.

When, therefore, Gandhi asked Patel to join him in finding recruits for the Army – the troops of the empire, not of satyagrahis –, Vallabhbhai readily agreed. We saw that Gandhi had supported the war effort at the Viceroy's conference in New Delhi. His expectation was bold. He hoped to be seen as the empire's ally despite his espousal of the release of the Ali brothers and despite his Champaran and Kheda struggles, which he did not play down in his talks with the Viceroy; in fact he went out of his way to tell Chelmsford that there was no question of his suspending the Kheda struggle, then at its peak. The Viceroy seemed willing to consider Gandhi's remarkable

* "Ek guru kaa aasra, ek guru ki aash; tinse raaji rahiye, auranse udaas."⁶²

definition of an ally, but his principal aides were not. Sir William Vincent, the Home Member, told Gandhi, "So far as I know, you have given a lot of trouble to the local authorities," and added, "Well, what have you done for the war? Have you brought a single recruit?"⁶³

Stung by Vincent's question, Gandhi embarked on his recruitment drive in Kheda. He would prove that he could supply soldiers. Vallabhbhai went along with the Mahatma because of his faith in him and also because he rather liked the idea that Gujaratis should learn the use of arms. Some of Gandhi's Ashram colleagues told him that recruiting soldiers did not sound like ahimsa to them. The Mahatma's reply was that an Indian's ahimsa was more often than not a mask for cowardice. "A bania," he roundly declared, "can never practise non-violence." Only those with the kshatriya spirit could. He would therefore invite the Kheda peasantry, proud of its warrior heritage, to become soldiers. It could lead to true ahimsa. Meanwhile, it would help India move to the status of "the Dominions overseas", enabling the Indian peasant to "aspire to the viceregal office".⁶⁴

Whether ahimsa-believers could recruit soldiers was not a problem that bothered Vallabhbhai. He wasn't sure that he was an ahimsa-believer anyway. What interested him more was Gandhi's view that "military discipline and experience" would yield strength with which "we may even fight the Empire, should it play foul with us."⁶⁵ In May the Gujarat Sabha resolved to recruit. On June 22, a week before the Kheda victory was celebrated, Gandhi addressed an appeal for soldiers to the "Sisters and Brothers of Kheda". By this time he, Patel, and a few others had begun their village-to-village effort. The saint-and-hero team had become a pair of "recruiting sergeants".⁶⁶

The bid flopped. Kheda's peasants had never really liked the Raj, and their struggle over revenue had made them like it less. Risking their lives for the empire was about the last thing the peasants wanted. Except in Ras and two or three other villages, they stayed away from Gandhi's meetings. Kheda's Patidars were obviously not keen to be seen as kshatriyas. In some villages people hid in their homes or in the fields when the Mahatma arrived. They hesitated to offer accommodation or food. Carrying in satchels their food and bedding, Gandhi, Patel and company walked from place to place under the summer sun. The party included, for long or short stretches, Mahadev Desai, Indulal Yagnik, who had played a vigorous role in the revenue struggle, Mavlankar, Pandya and Raojibhai. Often they slept on railway platforms. As Desai put it, they bore the style of soldiers on a march.⁶⁷ On June 26 Desai wrote:

We reached Vasad station in the evening, too late to catch the train and had to sleep on the platform. Vallabhbhai could not sleep in that uncongenial surrounding, but Bapu slept like a log.⁶⁸

Next day they had a cart ride from Mehmedabad to Navagam. Desai recorded what happened:

The day was scorching hot and the road full of rough stones. Our carriage rattled on with uncommon bumps. "Sorry, no nap for you," Vallabhbhai said to Bapu, but Bapu was proof against any disturbance. He fell sound asleep almost immediately after he got into the carriage.⁶⁹

This would have been the moment for Vallabhbhai to pick up his things and depart – if he had joined Gandhi for popularity. But he hadn't. The saint, the hero and the diarist cooked for one another. At other times they survived on groundnuts, jaggery, bananas and lemon juice. A month earlier callers and visitors would not leave the Mahatma alone. Now, in the same villages, he often had time to spare. Gandhi dictated and scribbled even more letters than his usual quota. Vallabhbhai cracked more jokes than ever but Desai was too busy writing out the Mahatma's letters to record Patel's fun-making. However, a diary entry gives a flavour of the recruiting days:

Broker (evidently a lawyer) came to the (Ahmedabad) station to see Bapu off, and said, "Will you not do something, sir, for these poor third-class passengers?" Vallabhbhai caught him: "Begin to travel third and things will improve." Just by way of a banter he added, "You blow away 40 rupees a day in your cigars and spend a lot over this and that. If only you travelled third and saved all that money for better uses!"

"Don't rail at my habits," Broker defended himself. "My cigar sometimes fetches me a thousand rupees in a moment. I earn thousands over my teacups and ice-cream plates. But how does it affect you? If you need money you have but to ask."

That tickled me to intervene: "Well, then, give us a thousand rupees for the recruiting campaign." Hardly had I finished when he took out a thousand-rupee note from his pocket and actually handed it to me!⁷⁰...

There was reserve and deference in Patel's attitude to Gandhi. Carefree remarks like "No nap for you!" were not as yet the staple of his conversation with Gandhi. However, his deference contained no timidity. An entry in Mahadev's Diary says: "I wrote a letter to Bapu and sent it through Vallabhbhai, who brought back to me Bapu's

immediate reply.”⁷¹ Learning that Gandhi was thinking of assigning him to Champaran for a while, Desai had wrongly concluded that he had lost Gandhi’s confidence. Writing a sad letter but flinching from handing it himself to the Mahatma, he “sent it through Vallabhbhai”.⁷²

After ten recruiting weeks in the hot countryside Gandhi was able to give a hundred names to Commissioner Pratt. His own was at the top of the list; he was prepared, Gandhi said, to stride up to German guns in France or wherever needed, but he would not carry a weapon. Vallabhbhai was listed next.⁷³ The Mahatma’s satyagraha deputy would be an actual army second-in-command! Several others of the hundred were Gandhi’s ashramites, their misgivings allayed. The question of training this unique company arose. The Army having no place in Gujarat for the purpose, Pratt proposed that the recruits go outside, but Gandhi asked for a centre to be opened in Kheda. He thought that the sights and sounds of drill, marching and shooting would attract more recruits.

Though not a landmark in Vallabhbhai’s life, the recruitment endeavour was a milestone in his general’s. It marked a phase when the Mahatma thought he could negotiate a partnership with the Raj. With Kheda and Champaran under his belt, and hoping, as he did, to win Muslim sympathy by working for the Ali brothers’ release, he would bid from a position of strength; and the recruitment would prove his bona fides. With passion and persistence he urged Tilak, Annie Besant, Jinnah and B. G. Horniman, editor of the progressive *Bombay Chronicle*, to “help the government with sepoys”.⁷⁴ His vision influenced his reaction to the Reforms scheme that Secretary of State Montagu and Viceroy Chelmsford had just put out. He read it on July 8 on a train between Barejadi and Nadiad and pronounced it “a strenuous effort to satisfy India” and one that “should be accepted”. Any amendments necessary could be secured, he told Jinnah, if only Indian leaders helped with recruitment.⁷⁵

Yet a deep foreboding told him that his grand design would not work – that in the end he would have to rise against the empire. This nagging feeling was linked to Gandhi’s awareness of the Indian public’s unhappiness and the smugness with which the Raj responded to it. The war’s forced loans, coercive recruitment and rising prices had caused an undercurrent of resentment. Perceiving the danger, Montagu had said in 1917, “I wish I could get the damned bureaucracy to realize that we are sitting on a volcano.”⁷⁶ Perhaps the Mahatma was also influenced by a belief that he had a mission to present satyagraha before India. In the last week of June he had spoken to Desai, “in a tone of deep gravity”, of his crucial uncertainty:

*We stand on the threshold of a twilight – whether morning or evening we do not know. One is followed by the night, the other heralds the dawn.*⁷⁷

In the midst of the debate between Gandhi and Pratt on the location of the training centre, the Mahatma collapsed. The heat, his failure with the peasants and the inner tension had knocked him out. Ambalal and his wife Sarladevi came from Ahmedabad, collected him and took him to their home. After receiving a month's care at the Sarabhais', he insisted on moving to his Ashram. It took the prospective commander another month to recover. By this time Germany was defeated and the Empire did not want any more sepoys.

* * *

At the end of August, when Gandhi fell ill, Vallabhbhai too returned to Ahmedabad – to his Bhadra home; to Mani, who was living in it, watched benevolently by the ladies in Mavlankar's house across the street; to his practice; and to Ahmedabad Municipality. Some of Ahmedabad's prominent citizens were tardy in paying their taxes. Several officials were also behind-hand, including an honorary first class magistrate. Patel decided that the city board should get the money due to it. One fine morning all the defaulters saw their names in *Prajabandhu*, the town newspaper. There was a rush of explanations and the arrears were paid up. *Prajabandhu* could print the names because Vallabhbhai had "asked a few pertinent questions to the president" at a public session of the city board.⁷⁸

Ahmedabad cantonment was where civil and military officers and some fortunate non-officials lived. They enjoyed cleaner air, wider roads, larger compounds and higher salaries than residents in the crowded town. Thanks to an arrangement with the Government, they also enjoyed cheaper municipal water. Patel fired his first shot against this unjust discrimination in April 1918 – in the middle of the Kheda campaign – but he would not win this battle until 1924. He fought, in the board, for a laboratory for testing the town's water and a plant for purifying it. He zeroed in, at the end of 1918, on Wadia, a hapless engineer employed by the town. The water pipes in this man's care did not open when a fire needed to be put out; when there was another fire, they overflowed – in the wrong direction! Vallabhbhai's arrow was, by contrast, well-aimed, and Mr Wadia was out of a job.

However, his heart was less in the city office, or in the courtroom, than in Gandhi's Ashram on the Sabarmati, to which he walked almost every day. There is no evidence that he felt like joining it. If nothing else, the Ashram's no-smoking rule would have put him off. But he liked Gandhi's company, and Mahadev's, and they enjoyed his. At

times he would take Mani to the Ashram; on one of these occasions, however, he forgot that he had brought her along – she was with Kasturba in the kitchen – and returned by himself to Bhadra.⁷⁹

As 1918 moved towards its close, Vallabhbhai and the Mahatma discussed the Montagu-Chelmsford (or Montford) Reforms and Congress's response to them. Congress met twice in 1918 – in a special session in Bombay in August and again at the end of the year in Delhi. Bombay marked a split. Moderates, welcoming the Reforms, met separately. Soon they would become a separate party, the Liberals. The majority – “extremists” or “nationalists”, led by Tilak and Chitta Ranjan Das, Bengal's foremost lawyer – termed the Reforms “disappointing and unsatisfactory”.

Neither Gandhi nor Vallabhbhai joined the Bombay or Delhi deliberations. While the lieutenant would do nothing in politics on his own, Gandhi did not attend partly because he was in poor health but largely because he disagreed with both the moderates and the extremists and wished to quarrel with neither. He was for accepting Montford “in the main” and for using satyagraha to have it improved. In August 1918, the month when he had his collapse, he wrote to Tilak:

I think we must accept the Montagu-Chelmsford Scheme in principle, but quite clearly state what improvements we want in it and fight until death to get them accepted. It is clear that the Moderate party will reject the principle of fighting altogether. You will certainly not fight in the same spirit as I. Mrs Besant had clearly told me she is not a satyagrahi. Nor do I wish to form a new faction....

I have an indubitable faith in my principle of satyagraha as a weapon of the strong. [But] I can patiently wait.⁸⁰

Six days later Gandhi talked about the futility of “vain disputations on the merits of the Montford Scheme”. More significantly, he also spoke of the “weapon” of “a firm resolve” to which satyagrahis would “stick like a leech even unto death”.⁸¹ Gandhi's mind was being cleared of uncertainty. He sensed an impending satyagraha, felt that this time it might be nationwide and seemed to think that the shortcomings of the Montford scheme would provide the issue. As 1918 turned to 1919, he realized he was right about satyagraha but wrong about the issue.

The Rowlatt Bills owed their name to an English judge, Sir Sidney Rowlatt, who had headed a wartime committee charged with finding ways of controlling sedition. It recommended, for suspected seditionists, arrests without trial or trials without appeal and proposed a two-year sentence in prison for offences like carrying a seditious

leaflet in one's pocket. The Rowlatt proposals were translated into two Bills that were published on January 18 and introduced in the Imperial Legislative Council on February 6 and 10.

Gandhi "detested" them.⁸² They were "deadly". More than that, they were symptomatic of "a deep-seated disease"—the Raj's belief that "Indians were its subjects", when the truth was that the Raj could "remain in India only as India's trustee and servant".⁸³ In his recruiting appeal he had affirmed his faith in "the innate goodness of the English nation".⁸⁴ The Bills drained it. If the Bills were enacted, said the Mahatma, the Reforms, thus far termed "acceptable in the main" and "good" by him, would be "useless".⁸⁵ An "indignant" but still very feeble Gandhi told Vallabhbhai that "something had to be done".⁸⁶ "I shook with rage," Gandhi would recall later. "I said to Vallabhbhai that I could do nothing unless he helped me."⁸⁷ Patel asked the Mahatma what he had in mind. "Satyagraha," said Gandhi.

Vallabhbhai was the first to hear of Gandhi's plan and the first to offer participation. "If even a few are willing," continued the Mahatma, "we must offer civil disobedience. If I were not confined to bed, I would start the fight alone, hoping that others would join later."⁸⁸ Patel joined Gandhi in convening a gathering at Sabarmati Ashram of about 20 people. B. G. Horniman, the *Bombay Chronicle* editor, Sarojini Naidu, the poetess, Umar Sobhani, the Bombay millowner, Indulal Yagnik and Shankerlal Banker were among the number. All of them, including the Mahatma and Vallabhbhai, signed a pledge that Gandhi had drafted:

*We solemnly affirm that in the event of these Bills becoming law and until they are withdrawn we shall refuse civilly to obey these laws and such other laws as a Committee to be hereafter appointed may think fit, and we further affirm that we will be faithful to truth and refrain from violence to life, person and property.*⁸⁹

The Mahatma called the signatories "the Indian covenanters" and their step "most momentous". With their decision, India's battle against the Raj moves to a new chapter. Until this moment Indian rebels had defied many a law of the Raj, and even killed some of the Raj's functionaries, but never openly or frontally. Now, for the first time, prominent Indians had publicly pledged their defiance. True, Kheda's peasants had done likewise, but the Raj could put that down to their quarrelsome nature. Barristers, an editor of European extraction and a distinguished poetess saying they would disobey the Raj was, as Gandhi perceived, a watershed in the Raj's history.

The Mahatma called on the Viceroy in New Delhi, urging the two Bills' withdrawal. Indian spokesmen in the Imperial Legislative Council, including Jinnah and also Vithalbhai Patel, who had just

graduated from the Bombay Council to the all-India body, stoutly opposed the Bills. Consideration of one of them was postponed but the other, a more-than-sufficient fetter, was rushed through the Council. Officials and nominated members ensured its passage, which took place on March 18. Four days later the Viceroy signed it into the Rowlatt Act.

By now Gandhi was in Madras, where he stayed with the lawyer Chakravarti Rajagopalachari – C.R., or Rajaji, as he would soon be known –, whom he was meeting for the first time. Mahadev Desai advised the Mahatma to cultivate his host, which Gandhi did. During their conversations he told C.R.: “Have you seen Vallabhbhai Patel? Do you know that I have found in him a most trustworthy man, staunch and brave?”⁹⁰

Learning, while in C.R.’s home, of the Viceroy’s assent to Rowlatt, Gandhi thought of an India-wide day of fasting and suspension of work. He first mentioned March 30 but then, aiming for a wider participation, changed the date to April 6. The nation would protest Rowlatt and purify itself for satyagraha that day. Gandhi had given the call on his own, without extremist or moderate backing, but the appointed day was a wonder. Towns and villages went quiet all over India.

In Ahmedabad a large number fasted, Hindus and Muslims both. In the evening Patel, who, curiously enough, had lost a contest five days earlier for the vice-presidency of the municipality,⁹¹ led “a big procession”.⁹² It ended in a disciplined rally, after which the satyagraha began. Two of the Mahatma’s books had been banned: *Hind Swaraj* and *Sarvodaya*. Vallabhbhai and others openly sold them. They were bought at fancy prices. But neither Patel nor anyone else was arrested, the city’s police explaining that the ban only applied to the older editions. That night, a newssheet entitled *Satyagraha Patrika* was cyclostyled in Vallabhbhai’s Bhadra residence. He chose not to register it, thus violating another law, and had it sold the next morning. The illegal newssheet listed Patel as printer and publisher but Frederick Pratt and his underlings again thought they would kill the commotion by ignoring it.

Having made preparations for March 30, the people of Delhi adhered to that date. Hindus and Muslims acted as one, and Swami Shraddhanand, a popular Hindu figure, was invited to speak at Jama Masjid. But the procession he was leading towards the mosque was fired at when it did not heed an order to stop. A few were killed, and the Swami invited the Mahatma to Delhi to restore peace. Punjab, too, was tense. Two of its leaders, Dr Satyapal, a Hindu, and Dr Kitchlew, a Muslim, pressed Gandhi to visit the province and calm it.

Instructing his followers not to compel anyone to fast or suspend work, Gandhi spent April 6 in Bombay. A huge crowd heard him in

the morning and again in the evening. Prayers were offered at temples, and Muslims took the Mahatma to a mosque on Grant Road where he spoke to more than five thousand. As in Ahmedabad, unregistered newssheets were brought out in Bombay, Madras and elsewhere. Gandhi styled himself as the editor of Bombay's *Satyagrahi* while C.R. litho-copied another *Satyagrahi* in his Madras home. These offences, too, were disregarded. Both teams, the Raj's and Gandhi's, were working to plan.

The Raj's plan was to keep Gandhi out of Delhi and Punjab. On the orders of Michael O'Dwyer, Punjab's Lieutenant-Governor, Gandhi was taken off his train at Palwal on the Punjab border and forcibly sent back to Bombay; for part of the journey the Mahatma was confined in a goods train. This was on April 8. Desai immediately "wired the news to Vallabhbhai".⁹³ O'Dwyer also had Satyapal and Kitchlew arrested and removed from Amritsar.

Word of Gandhi's arrest sparked disturbances in several places. Serious riots occurred in Ahmedabad and Viramgam, 40 miles west of Ahmedabad, and in Amritsar. Six were killed and eighteen injured in Viramgam, while in Ahmedabad, according to the Raj, 24 were killed and over a hundred injured. Later Gandhi estimated that casualties in Ahmedabad were twice the Raj's figures. Most of the deaths were caused by police and military firing, and Ahmedabad was under martial law from April 11. Rioters in Ahmedabad had burnt police stations, telegraph offices and even the Collector's office, and killed an English sergeant. Hearing, on April 10, that a train was bringing troops from Bombay for Ahmedabad, a group of Patidars in Nadiad removed a rail near Nadiad station and threw it into a ditch. A few hours later the train with over 200 troops on board ground to a halt on the spot; "it remained upright so that nobody was injured".⁹⁴ And in Viramgam the Mamlatdar was burnt to death.

Joined by Dr Balwantray Kanuga and other friends, Vallabhbhai went from one part of Ahmedabad to another, striving to pacify angry millhands and other enraged citizens, taking the injured to hospitals and sending food to dependants of the killed and injured. Let out in Bombay on April 10, Gandhi calmed that city's angry men. When Bombay's police commissioner gave him the Ahmedabad and Viramgam news and shouted that he, the Mahatma, was responsible, Gandhi left for Ahmedabad where, straight from the station, he went to Frederick Pratt. This was on the morning of April 13. Despite martial law, a "very angry and indignant" Pratt⁹⁵ allowed Gandhi to hold a public meeting near the Ashram the next day. Over two thousand came. Patel read out the speech of the Mahatma, who was too weak to speak himself. Vallabhbhai's deep voice was probably unemotional when it delivered the following sentences:

Brothers, I am ashamed of the events of the last few days. Those responsible have disgraced me. In the name of satyagraha, we burnt down buildings, forcibly captured weapons, extorted money, stopped trains, cut off telegraph wires, killed innocent people, and plundered shops and homes.

A most brutal rumour was set afloat that Anasuyabehn was arrested. You have disgraced Anasuyabehn. Under the cloak of her arrest, heinous deeds have been done.

We should repent and do penance. I would also advise you, if it is possible for you, to fast for 24 hours in slight expiation of these sins. It is open to anybody to say that but for the Satyagraha campaign there would not have been this violence. My responsibility is a million times greater than yours... I will, therefore, fast for 72 hours.

If a redress of grievances is only possible by means of ill-will for, and slaughter of, Englishmen, I for one would do without Swaraj and without redress.⁹⁶

Four days later Gandhi suspended satyagraha and went to Bombay, where the police commissioner asked him: "Had Vallabhbhai no hand in the Ahmedabad disturbances? And Mohanlal Pandya?" Replied the Mahatma: "None whatever. You have no idea of their exertions for peace."⁹⁷ But Frederick Pratt was taking no chances in Ahmedabad. Patel wrote to the Mahatma:

All the private bungalows in the Shahibag area have been requisitioned by the military. So also the Gujarat Club. Soldiers have been posted around my house.⁹⁸

Returning at once to Ahmedabad, Gandhi found that a CID officer was in town to investigate a charge that Vallabhbhai had set fire to the main telegraph office. One of Patel's fellow-councillors on the city board had given the "information" to the police, claiming that he had seen the deed. Collector Chatfield of Ahmedabad told the CID officer that at the time of the alleged occurrence Vallabhbhai was with him, discussing how the riots could be controlled. And Healey, the city's police superintendent, was so impressed with Patel's role in re-establishing peace that ten years later he would tell the government that "without Vallabhbhai it will be impossible for you to maintain order".⁹⁹ Chatfield's work, it may be noted, was appreciated by both the Mahatma and Patel, Gandhi calling him "a thorough gentleman" who "was so considerate and sober all through the April disturbances". It soon transpired that the soldiers posted at Vallabhbhai's house had interpreted the normal switching-on and

switching-off of lights in the house as messages signalled to agitators.¹⁰⁰

We must look now at the most painful of the April 1919 episodes, the Jallianwalla tragedy. We noted the removal from Amritsar of Satyapal and Kitchlew. Protesters took out a procession; it was fired at. In revenge the infuriated crowd killed five or six Englishmen in their offices and assaulted a British schoolmistress, Miss Sherwood. Next day Amritsar was taken over by General Reginald Dyer, a professional soldier born in Simla. He prohibited meetings, but his ban was proclaimed only in English. On the afternoon of April 13, over 10,000 people, Sikhs, Hindus and Muslims, assembled at Jallianwalla Bagh, a public ground enclosed by five-foot-high walls. Most of them were totally unaware of Dyer's ban. None had fire-arms. Suddenly, the meeting barely begun, Dyer and fifty rifle-carrying Gurkha and Baluchi soldiers appeared. They had taken possession of the entrance to the ground, which was also its only exit. Without a single call to the audience to disperse, Dyer ordered fire. His men obeyed, for ten death-filled minutes. Almost every bullet got a man. According to official estimates, 379 were killed and over 100 injured.

What followed was just as unbelievable. O'Dwyer imposed martial law throughout Punjab. In Amritsar Dyer laid down that every Indian walking on the street where Miss Sherwood was attacked would crawl; Indians on vehicles or horses would dismount at the sight of a British officer and salaam him; hundreds of students would walk 16 miles a day for roll-calls. Violators were flogged at a public whipping post. Elsewhere in the province men were stripped and beaten. In two places groups of peasants were bombed from the air. A non-existent revolutionary plot was crushed. Jallianwalla occurred almost exactly when Gandhi was working on his Ahmedabad speech that asked for penance for Indian violence against the Raj. Righting the Punjab humiliations would ere long become Gandhi's insistent demand; he, and many others, would hold that the Punjab government's ban on his visit, which "they knew was a mission of peace", was an act of folly;¹⁰¹ but there is no doubt that Jallianwalla helped evoke the admission Gandhi made in July in Nadiad: he had made "a Himalayan miscalculation", the Mahatma said, in launching satyagraha without training the public.¹⁰²

Ahmedabad was fined Rs 9 lakhs for its riots, Viramgam Rs 42,000. Since it was believed that some Patidars had removed that rail line near Nadiad, and since the Vaniyas of Nadiad had closed

their shops on April 6, the Patidars and Vaniyas of that town were ordered to pay Rs 15,556 for “the extra police” that, in the Raj’s view, Nadiad required. As the Kheda Collector clinchingly put it, while justifying the “police-tax”: “Moreover, Gandhi, Gokaldas and Phulchand Shah* are Vaniyas.”¹⁰³ The “police-tax” deeply offended the people of Nadiad, the great majority of whom had remained entirely peaceful during April. In fact Kheda’s Collector had himself acknowledged, in a letter to the president of the Nadiad municipality, the “praiseworthy conduct” of the town’s citizens.¹⁰⁴ The rail removal was the work of a fringe element.

Appearing for the accused in several riot and sabotage cases, all tried before a special court set up for the purpose, Vallabhbhai performed superbly. In the Nadiad rail case, where a group of Patidars were the accused, he established that two of the prosecution witnesses were criminals widely distrusted in Nadiad. He also easily proved, by means of a demonstration on the railway track, that the spanner allegedly used to unscrew the bolts on the line did not fit the bolts. The spanner no doubt belonged to one of the accused; it was a tool for the pump of his well! All the accused were acquitted. Forty eight leading men of the village of Narsanda near Nadiad, most of them Patidars again, were arrested and accused of cutting telegraph wires. Patel proved to the special court that a police sub-inspector had intimidated witnesses into giving false evidence, and that the evidence of the most important prosecution witness, Faiju Umrav, contained fatal inconsistencies. All the Narsanda accused were acquitted. While Vallabhbhai’s triumphs before the special court owed much to his skill, a part was also played by the unwillingness of the people of Nadiad to assist the Raj with evidence.¹⁰⁵

The Raj forced Patel and his friend Dr Kanuga to contribute to the Rs 9 lakh fine levied on Ahmedabad. The Collector of Ahmedabad – not Chatfield, who had been transferred, but his successor – was empowered to exempt deserving citizens but did not feel that Patel and Kanuga merited the exemption. The two did not feel that they merited the fine. Attachment orders were issued. What followed is best conveyed in the words of the Mahatma in *Young India*, the journal he edited from the summer of 1919:

Dr Kanuga is a very busy practitioner and his box is always full. The watchful attaching official attached his cash box and extracted enough money to discharge the writ of execution. Mr Patel sported no cash box. A lawyer’s business cannot be conducted on those lines. A sofa of his sitting room was therefore attached, advertised for sale

* Gokaldas and Shah were Nadiad activists.

and duly sold. Both these satyagrahis thus completely saved their consciences.¹⁰⁶

Another sword hung over Vallabhbhai: the possibility of a declaration that he was unfit to practise. The threat was linked to his pledge to disobey certain laws. The Bombay High Court went into the question. Arguing for Vallabhbhai and other barristers and lawyers similarly threatened, Sir Chimanlal Setalvad said:

[Rather than proving] any kind of misconduct... the pledge indeed proved them to be respectable gentlemen, for they had the courage to announce publicly their honest belief.... The pledge says quite plainly that they must conduct themselves in accordance with truth and that no harm should be caused to anybody.

*How can a person taking such a pledge be dishonourable? In criticizing certain actions of their government, many well-known barristers in England had threatened to wage war against it. Nevertheless, no one ever dreamt of withdrawing from them their right of practice.*¹⁰⁷

Their Lordships did not accept Setalvad's argument. However, giving as their reason the fact that "the Satyagraha Sabha has been quiescent since the riots of April", they postponed a penalty. Patel's reaction was communicated by Gandhi:

*The judgement of the High Court is highly unsatisfactory. It has shirked the issue. The logical outcome of the judgement should have been punishment and not a postponement of it. The lawyers in question had shown no repentance.*¹⁰⁸

The High Court's warning would remain a dead letter. In the years that followed Vallabhbhai and hundreds of other lawyers went beyond pledges. They broke laws and courted imprisonment. But they were not deprived of their right to practise.

* * *

In December, Patel went with the Mahatma to Congress's annual session. By design it was held in Amritsar. The President was the Kashmiri Brahmin, Motilal Nehru, Allahabad's brilliant lawyer. Lokmanya Tilak was present, having returned from England where he had unsuccessfully fought a libel action against the writer Valentine Chirol. Annie Besant, too, was in Amritsar. So were the Ali brothers, at last released, Calcutta's Bipin Chandra Pal and Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya from Benares. Amritsar faced two

issues, the Punjab wrongs and the Montford proposals, now translated into the Reforms Act. Tilak, Pal and Das led the attack on the Reforms; Malaviya, Annie Besant and Motilal Nehru headed a group that seemed willing to accept them. Discussion was heated and a consensus seemed impossible but in the end a formulation moved by Gandhi and seconded by Jinnah found acceptance. It said that though the Reforms Act was inadequate and disappointing, Congress would work it.

With the memory of Jallianwalla so fresh and, in Amritsar, so intimate, the assembly was in a deeply anti-British frame of mind but Gandhi was not. He noted three positive signs: HMG had appointed the Hunter Commission to go into the Punjab events; the Ali brothers had been released; finally, the Rowlatt Act, while not repealed, was not being used. And he insisted that the folly was not all on one side. K. M. Munshi observed the clash between the two outlooks:

A resolution was moved in the Subjects Committee condemning both the massacre of Jallianwalla Bagh and the mad frenzy of the crowds. The hearts of most of us revolted at the latter part of the resolution.... This must have been Mrs Besant's work, many thought; she was after all British. One Punjab leader gave expression to the feeling rather crudely: no one born of an Indian mother, said he, could have drafted this resolution. Lokmanya too was indignant and so were Pal and C. R. Das; and the latter part of the resolution was lost by an overwhelming majority.

Next day the President wanted the committee to reconsider the resolution, as Gandhiji, he said, was very keen on it. There were vehement protests. Ultimately Gandhi was helped to the table to move that the resolution be reconsidered. He spoke sitting. Out of respect the house sat quiet but with ill-concealed impatience.

Referring to the remark that no son born of an Indian mother could have drafted the resolution, Gandhiji stated that he had considered deeply and long whether as an Indian he could have drafted the resolution, for indeed he had drafted it. But after long searching of heart he had come to the conclusion that only a person born of an Indian mother could have drafted it.

And then he spoke as if his whole life depended upon the question.... When he stopped, we were at his feet.... The resolution was reconsidered and accepted in its original form.¹⁰⁹

In Munshi's view, "the old guard were routed" at Amritsar. "Gandhiji was left in possession of the field."¹¹⁰ He was also left holding two babies. Congress asked him to travel through Punjab and

write a report on Jallianwalla and related events – and to prepare a new constitution for Congress.

True to his conception of the loyal lieutenant, Vallabhbhai did not speak at Amritsar. He confined himself to renewing friendships with persons like Rajendra Prasad and Kripalani, making new ones with men like Rajagopalachari, becoming acquainted with Motilal Nehru and his son Jawaharlal, observing the sway of his general and studying the assemblage. The Mahatma's stand at Amritsar made a deep impression on Patel. Eight months later he would say:

I can still visualize the scene on the last day of the Amritsar Congress, when Gandhiji, in the shamiana adjoining the Jallianwalla Bagh grounds, which only a short while earlier had been drenched with blood, appealed to the indignant delegates and the people to pursue the path of cooperation....¹¹¹

Another man on whom Gandhiji's Amritsar role made an impact was Frederick Pratt. He read of it in England, where he was spending his leave, and sent the Mahatma an unusual letter:

A week or two ago when I read the account of your speech in the Amritsar Congress, in which you and Mr Jinnah were fighting the battle of trust and cooperation against suspicion and disappointment, I felt that I would like to write and congratulate you on the stand you took.

I write this purely as a private individual. Our relations in the past have not been harmonious. Speaking for myself only, I feel sure that there have been hard thoughts and hard words against you, which were not justified.

But the future matters far more than the past, and I wish to grasp the hand of fellowship and cooperation in the same spirit in which you extended it in your admirable speech.¹¹²

How could Frederick Pratt know, while writing this courageous letter, that the fates were not going to allow a union of brown and white hands?

* * *

Devadas, the Mahatma's youngest son, was at Amritsar with his father, Motilal had his son Jawahar with him and Pandit Malaviya his son Govind. Mani, now nearly sixteen and Dahya, fourteen, were on Vallabhbhai's mind. The first thing he did on returning from Amritsar was to write to his daughter, who was spending her holidays at Borsad with Kashibhai. The letter was in English, the only language thus far for correspondence between father and daughter, or father

and son, or brother and sister. In it, for once, Patel is explicit about his feeling.

Ahmedabad, 3.1.20: *My dear Mani, I received your letter this morning on my return from Amritsar today. I am glad you are enjoying yourself. Your uncle (Vithalbhai) will now sail for India shortly. I am just writing to your brother to come here for a few days if his school (in Bombay) is not reopened. When are you coming here? With love, Your affectionate Father.*¹¹³

The first elections under the Reforms Act were due in November 1920. Congress, we saw, had decided to work the Act. It envisaged partial self-government for the provinces, exercised by legislatures elected under a wide though not universal franchise and by cabinets responsible to the legislatures. However, vital subjects were “reserved” for the Governor and a nominated council. Council members would thus have more powers than cabinet ministers in the diarchy. At the centre there would be no power-sharing. While Lord Curzon, the former Viceroy and now Britain’s Foreign Secretary, called the Act “rash and revolutionary”, most vocal Indians felt it erred on the side of caution and continuity, but Gandhi and Vallabhbhai thought it could lead, in some years, to Dominion status.

Patel therefore announced, doubtless with Gandhi’s approval, that he would be a candidate for the Bombay legislature from Kheda.¹¹⁴ The pact with Vithalbhai had been abrogated at the start of 1918, when Vallabhbhai responded to Gandhi’s call for help with the peasants’ struggle. In the middle of July 1920, however, Vallabhbhai firmly withdrew his candidature. For the next fourteen years he would be a strong opponent of councils. The resolute reversal was connected with a change in the Mahatma’s strategy, which in turn was linked to the Punjab events and even more to Muslim feeling.

Indian Muslims hated the empire’s treatment of Turkey, then the world’s largest Islamic state. Not only was Turkey defeated along with Germany; it transpired in August 1919 that Britain intended to end the Turkish Sultan’s custodianship of Islam’s holy places in Arabia. To Indian Muslims this was sacrilege and betrayal both. It was a sacrilege because the Sultan of Turkey was more than his country’s ruler; he was the Khalifa, the head of the faithful, charged with duty to protect the holy places. It was a betrayal because in the middle of the War Premier Lloyd George had promised that the Allies were not “fighting to deprive Turkey of the rich and renowned lands of Asia Minor”.¹¹⁵ Depending on this assurance, a number of Indian Muslims had soldiered for the empire against Turkey. After his release, Muhammad Ali went to London with a few other Muslims and pleaded for the

Sultan's control. Premier Lloyd George's response was not calculated to soothe Muslim sentiment. He told the deputation:

*Turkey slammed the gates in the face of an old ally.... Germany has had justice, pretty terrible justice. Why should Turkey escape?*¹¹⁶

In May 1920 the final terms for Turkey were announced. She lost all her colonies and the Greek-majority areas she once controlled. Saudi Arabia was recognized as a free state under a pro-British chieftain, Faisal. Palestine and Iraq, the former containing Jerusalem and the latter Karbala, places almost as sacred to Muslims as Mecca and Medina, were placed under British guardianship, while France was to "advise and assist Syria". Indian Muslims viewed this as an affront. That Faisal was a Muslim was not good enough. Suzerainty over Mecca and Medina belonged to none but the Khalifa. Unless they fought to restore Khilafat – the Khalifa's overlordship –, they too would be betrayers. Later this was shown to be an erroneous understanding of Islam. A British civil servant called J. W. Hore correctly pointed out to the Raj that "there is no canon which lays down that the Sultan of Turkey is and always must remain the Khalifa"; a hoary custom was not necessarily a canon. That Hore was right, and the leaders of Indian Muslims wrong, was proved in March 1924 when Mustafa Kamal, who had seized power in Turkey, abolished Khilafat and expelled the Sultan, and no Indian Muslim felt that his Muslimness had been diminished.¹¹⁷

This is the cool wisdom of hindsight. In 1920 Indian Muslims were passionate about the assault on Khilafat. And Gandhi chose to make their cause his own; he also asked other Hindus to do likewise. We need not, in this study of Vallabhbhai's life, seek to prove Gandhi's motive. Some of his later Muslim critics have implied that the Mahatma consciously egged the Muslims on because he wanted them bloodied in a clash with the Raj. Some of Gandhi's Hindu opponents have interpreted his stand as yet another evidence of a lifelong deference towards Muslims. Noting the Hindu-Muslim partnership that flowed from it, the Mahatma's foes in the Raj saw brilliant strategy in his position. Gandhi himself claimed that Hindu-Muslim unity was an incessant aspiration for him.

To India's enraged Muslims he proposed a course of non-violent non-cooperation with the Raj. Resort to arms was impossible as well as undesirable, but the Raj would fail if Indians withdrew their cooperation. Hindus should join the step. Not to share the struggle of betrayed Muslims would be dishonourable. Gandhi first referred to non-cooperation at a conference of agitated Muslims in Delhi in November 1919, a month before the Amritsar Congress. Britain's terms for Turkey were not yet known then, and the Mahatma said

that non-cooperation should be considered “in case of a betrayal”.¹¹⁸ It was a sword he bared and then quickly put into its sheath. In March, after Lloyd George had given his answer to the Muslim deputation, Gandhi called Khilafat “the question of questions” and revealed the sword of non-cooperation again. The Muslims said with fervour that they would use it. The Hindus were slower to respond, but the fates intervened in May – the very month when the final terms for Turkey were announced.

Published on May 25, the Hunter Commission’s Report on Punjab confirmed all the grim facts about Jallianwalla that the Mahatma’s Punjab study had revealed, yet it drew weak conclusions. Michael O’Dwyer came through unharmed, as did other Punjab officials. General Dyer was held guilty of “a grave error of judgement” and, as a result, deprived of his command, but not only did the House of Lords give him a vote of approval, British admirers presented him with a sword of honour and 20,000 pounds! Embittered Hindus and Sikhs now joined embittered Muslims in a mental rejection of the empire. Gandhi’s suppressed intimation that he would one day rise against the empire came true, all uncertainty was removed from his mind and he declared that non-violent non-cooperation would be launched on August 1, 1920.

Indulal Yagnik wrote in 1971 that Vallabhbhai was “sceptical” about “Gandhiji’s Khilafat propaganda”. According to Yagnik, who after 1921 became one of Patel’s leading critics and opponents, Vallabhbhai once said: “Imagine our fighting for the Arabs of Arabia and Palestine, Syria and Mesopotamia when we ourselves are held as slaves under British bayonets in our own land.”¹¹⁹ The scepticism referred to by Yagnik may have been real. If so, it was also short-lived. In August 1920 Vallabhbhai said:

*The Turkish empire was divided in spite of Britain’s promise. The Sultan was made a prisoner in Constantinople. Syria was absorbed by France. Smyrna and Thrace were swallowed by Greece, while Mesopotamia and Palestine were taken possession of by the British. In Arabia, too, a ruler was created who would support the British. Even the Viceroy admitted that some of the conditions of peace could not but offend the Muslim community. It has been a heart-breaking episode for the Indian Muslims, and how can Hindus stand unaffected when they see their fellow countrymen thus in distress?*¹²⁰

The truth is that the opportunity for a joint Hindu-Muslim struggle to wrest power from the British thrilled Vallabhbhai and many other Hindus. Thus Tilak said at the end of May 1920 that “Hindus would support” Muslim decisions on Khilafat.¹²¹ Congress, however, had not

yet made up its mind, and left the decision to a special session fixed for September. To arm Gandhi with Gujarat's mandate, Vallabhbhai organized a conference in Ahmedabad at the end of August and gave it his views.

When the war was over we were given the Rowlatt Act which deprived us of freedom of action. When the people protested against such a tyrannical piece of legislation, the Government decided on a policy of suppressing all resistance by force. Smarting under a sense of injustice, a section of our people in a fit of temporary insanity committed atrocities.

We cannot defend these mad acts of our people....But [the Government's reaction] exceeded all bounds of reasonableness. And finally the Government appointed a committee ostensibly to investigate the happenings in Jallianwalla Bagh and Lahore but actually, as it has turned out, to hush up everything.

In the House of Lords, the lords verily showed their nobility! The murder of so many innocent men and women was to them nothing as compared with the honour of one callous Englishman. That officer they regarded as brave, and those innocent persons who were killed as rebels!

Admitting that non-cooperation had its risks, Vallabhbhai asked:

Is there less risk in doing nothing? Has anyone ever, for fear of possible risks, given up great experiments? If the British, empire-builders that they are, had been afraid of risks, would they have survived for so long?

Until about three months earlier, Patel had thought of a seat in the Bombay legislature for himself. But that was before the Lords' approbation of Dyer and before the declaration of the final terms for Turkey. Now Vallabhbhai was certain that the Reforms were "a trap".

What difference will it make if we merely replace some foreign officers by Indians? How will we benefit from an Indian Governor instead of an English one? Are there not among the British Governors also men of noble character and great ability? Although a murderous assault was made on Lord Hardinge in Chandni Chowk, he did not want any retaliatory or repressive action taken.*

* In 1912

*There must be a radical change. The Government of India must be run for the people of India.*¹²²

Vallabhbhai's friend Sir Ramanbhai Nilkanth, president of the Ahmedabad municipality, and a few others opposed non-cooperation at this conference, but a resolution favouring it was passed by a large majority "with loud cheers".¹²³

By this time there had been another intervention of fate. In the early hours of August 1, the date on which, without waiting for Congress, Gandhi inaugurated non-cooperation, the 64-year-old Lokmanya Tilak passed away in Bombay, his health undermined by diabetes and by years in prison. A formidable figure who might have opposed non-cooperation had gone. That day, after shouldering the bier and standing besides the flames that consumed the Lokmanya's body on the Chowpatty sands, the Mahatma sent a letter to the Viceroy and enclosed with it the medals the Raj had given for his services in South Africa. He could not, Gandhi told Chelmsford, retain either respect or affection for the Raj after the double letdown over Khilafat and Punjab.

The Viceroy, thought of as a friend by Gandhi in 1918 and even in 1919, called non-cooperation "the most foolish of all foolish schemes". Though the Khilafat body formed by India's Muslims had embraced Gandhi's weapon, several Congress stalwarts agreed with Chelmsford. They thought they would thwart non-cooperation at the special session in Calcutta. Arriving for it, Jinnah was met off his train by Motilal Nehru, who hoped to coordinate strategies for defeating the Mahatma.¹²⁴ Men like Das, Bipin Pal, the Punjab's Lajpat Rai, who was to preside, and Malaviya were cool towards non-cooperation. However, Calcutta marked the start of the influence of younger men: Vallabhbhai, Rajagopalachari, Rajendra Prasad, Abul Kalam Azad and Jawaharlal Nehru. They did not mount the podium but their conviction in Gandhi's favour stood out, and other supporters of Gandhi were also firm in their views. Motilal was the first of the old guard to sense the new mood. He voted with Gandhi in Calcutta, where, after a great and vigorous debate, non-cooperation was adopted by Congress.

Changing their minds one by one, all the stalwarts boarded the Gandhi vehicle after Calcutta – all except Annie Besant, Malaviya and Jinnah. And even Jinnah joined in the boycott of the November-December elections, the first under the Reforms Act. At the end of December Congress met again, in Nagpur. By this time the country's preference was plain to everyone. After having opposed non-cooperation three months earlier at Calcutta, Chitta Ranjan Das proposed it in Nagpur. Lajpat Rai and Pal also backed it. But Jinnah

walked out after unsuccessfully opposing a change in Congress's goal from "Swaraj within the empire" to, simply, "Swaraj".¹²⁵

Vallabhbhai's only intervention at Nagpur was on this question. Jinnah had argued that the removal of the phrase "within the empire" implied an unconstitutional bid for complete independence. Patel observed:

*Some say that we wish to leave the empire. Whether we want to remain within the empire or leave it depends entirely on the British and on their intentions. We consider it desirable to remain within if we can at the same time enjoy complete independence, but if that is not possible we shall of course be compelled to go out of the empire.*¹²⁶

Annie Besant did not attend the Nagpur session. Jinnah left it before the final voting. Malaviya was present in town but ill. A message he sent opposing both non-cooperation and the change in Congress's goal was heard with respect but it influenced no one. When non-cooperation was put to vote, only two persons voiced dissent, one from Sind and another from U.P. Their names are not recorded.¹²⁷

What precisely did Gandhi mean when he asked India to non-cooperate with the Raj? He, and now Congress too, asked lawyers to withdraw from the Raj's courts, the aristocracy to give up their Raj-bestowed titles, politicians to boycott the councils, parents to remove their children from the Raj's schools, and everyone to wear khadi, the handspun and handwoven cloth that spelt self-reliance and affinity with the deprived to the Mahatma, who had discovered it in 1919. The climax, said Gandhi, would be a refusal to pay taxes.

At Nagpur Congress also adopted Gandhi's draft of a new constitution for the body; he had been asked a year earlier to prepare it. Now any adult accepting Congress's goal and willing to pay an annual subscription of four annas (25p) could become a member. The new scheme provided for democratically elected committees at all levels – village, town, taluka, district, province and all-India. Gandhi's provinces were linguistic and did not coincide with the Raj's provinces. From the end of 1920, therefore, Gujarat had a provincial Congress committee, as did Maharashtra, Andhra, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka and Kerala. Elected annually by the provincial units, the Congress President would nominate a working committee of fifteen in which he would only be *primus inter pares*. All the committees, including the national committee, were new features.

The Gujarat Sabha was reorganized into the Gujarat Provincial Congress Committee, or the GPCC, of which Vallabhbhai became

the first President. He would stay in that position until 1946. As 1920 ended, he bore the stamp of a full-time public worker. Travelling incessantly, he "ate what and where he could, and slept when and where he could"¹²⁸ and saw less and less of his Bhadra home. Having championed non-cooperation, he formally ceased his legal practice. In fact it had ended in 1919: his final courtroom performances were in defence of the Nadiad and Narsanda accused.

He had made it his business to know as many village and town activists as he could. They gave him a high degree of loyalty. Soon district and town Congress committees would be established, but Patel would continue to deal directly with the village or ward leader. Silent about his own thoughts, he would ferret out, in a few minutes of seemingly innocent questioning, a mass of facts about local rivalries and the strengths and weaknesses of individuals.¹²⁹

Influenced by Gandhi, 16-year-old Mani had accepted non-cooperation on her own. In September 1920 she left the Government school, a decision that her father endorsed, and joined Ahmedabad's Proprietary School, which surrendered its affiliation to the Government. She and Dahya passed their matric in March 1921 and joined the Gujarat Vidyapith, started in October 1920 as a corollary of the boycott of the Raj's colleges. Adopting the Vidyapith "as his own special child",¹³⁰ Vallabhbhai laboured to keep it financially afloat. Brilliant men – J. B. Kripalani, Kaka Kalelkar, A. T. Gidwani and Kishorlal Mashruwala among them – would soon join its faculty.

Vallabhbhai's municipal work, too, was curtailed. In time he would return to it with vigour, but in 1920 he confined himself to only two civic activities. In July he proposed a new road to relieve the town's extreme congestion.¹³¹ Later in the year, after non-cooperation had been launched, Vallabhbhai began a notable battle to free the schools run by the municipality from the Raj's control.

* * *

Non-cooperation had distinguished critics. Tagore warned against negativism and said that India had to be freed "not only from aliens but [also] from indolence and ignorance."¹³² Annie Besant said that Gandhi was sowing anarchy. Yet the India of 1921 witnessed unusual and courageous happenings. Vallabhbhai was not alone in giving up his practice. Chitta Ranjan Das in Calcutta and Motilal and Jawaharlal Nehru in Allahabad gave up theirs and abandoned as well their lives of riches and ease. Rajagopalachari and T. Prakasam in Madras and Rajendra Prasad in Patna tossed away career and comfort. Hundreds of other lawyers did the same. Though not a lawyer, Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan stood up to fight the Raj in the rugged Northwest Frontier. Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, scholar and powerful Urdu

writer, did likewise in Calcutta. Hakim Ajmal Khan, a noted physician of Delhi, surrendered his title and medals.

The Raj's colleges saw thousands of bright young men walk out. Some entered newly opened institutions like the Gujarat Vidyapith, the Kashi Vidyapith of Benares, the Jamia Millia of Aligarh (later moved to Delhi), the Bengal National College of Calcutta (25-year-old Subhas Chandra Bose left the Indian Civil Service to head it), the Patna National College and the Swadhinata Vidyalaya of Madras. Others gave themselves to the spreading of khadi or of Hindustani, the elevation of untouchables, a campaign against liquor, or for Hindu-Muslim unity, tribal welfare, or the restoration of Khilafat. In some places peasants learned to settle their cases out of court. The propaganda against alcohol hurt the Raj's treasuries. Hindus and Muslims fraternized in unprecedented ways. Orthodox Brahmins asked Muslims to meals in their homes. In numerous Muslim homes Id was celebrated without beef. Watching the events, Lord Reading, Chelmsford's successor, wrote to his son of "the bridge over the gulf between Hindu and Muslim" that had apparently been created.¹³³

Gandhi set three specific targets: ten million members for Congress; ten million rupees for national work, to be raised in the name of Tilak, and two million charkhas in use. The goals assigned to Gujarat-cum-Kathiawad were 300,000 members, one million rupees and one lakh charkhas. Hitting the targets became a question of honour for Vallabhbhai. Narhari was no doubt exaggerating when he wrote that Patel and his colleagues "covered the entire province by personal visits to every village and indeed to every house in every village,"¹³⁴ but the suggestion of Vallabhbhai's determination and of the fanning out of his workers is entirely valid. Thanks to his leadership and example, and thanks also to the atmosphere of the time, Gujarat and Kathiawad raised, between them, not one million rupees but a million and a half, and the targets for members and charkhas were also fulfilled.

Gujarat's Liberals made an attempt to repel the new spirit. A public meeting on "The Development and Disappearance of Non-cooperation" was announced. Patel went to it. In the Ahmedabad hall were the Collector, police officers, magistrates and mamlatdars. After a learned lecturer had read out his English address, Vallabhbhai obtained the chair's permission to speak. On finding that Patel was speaking in Gujarati, the chairman requested him to switch to English. Replying that he did not find the request reasonable, Vallabhbhai added that the Collector's knowledge of Gujarati was excellent and that it could be presumed that the other officials also understood Gujarati. The chairman did not press Patel, who continued in Gujarati, whereupon the Collector rose and left, as did the other Britons in the hall. After Vallabhbhai had finished, all that

the chairman could say before declaring the meeting closed was that Gujarat's cooperators had much to learn from non-cooperators, who "mixed freely with the people, talked to them and won them over by working amongst them"!¹³⁵

Here and there Raj-sponsored "Leagues of Peace and Order" appeared. Patel summoned some of his best scorn when one or two of the Leaguers showed their face in Gujarat:

I had hoped that Gujarat would be spared this hypocrisy. If these bodies are being established with the help of officials, they may lead to unrest rather than peace.

*Who are their organisers? Were they, until now, supporters of unrest? The claim of these associations that law and order is being maintained because of their efforts is comparable to the claim of the dog walking underneath the bullock cart that he is pulling the cart.*¹³⁶

His favourite simile for mockery, the dog-under-the-cart would continue to issue from Vallabhbhai's lips until his last days. He and the Ali brothers shared the platform at the Gujarat Political Conference held in Ahmedabad on May 30, 1921. The summer was hot, and New Delhi's rulers had escaped to the hills of Simla. Patel's description, in his presidential address, of an independent India of the future revealed a practical vision empty of all poetry and romance but not devoid of some effective rhetoric. It was also marked by insight into the ordinary Indian's feelings:

*No one would die of starvation in independent India. Its grain would not be exported. Cloth would not be imported by it. Its leaders would neither use a foreign language nor rule from a remote place 7,000 feet above sea level. Its military expenditure would not be heavy. Its army would not subjugate its own people or other lands. Its best-paid officials would not earn a great deal more than its lowest-paid servants. And finding justice in it would be neither costly nor difficult.*¹³⁷

The Hindu-Muslim entente received a knock in the summer. Infuriated by tales of insults to their religious leaders, the Moplahs of Malabar, Muslims tracing their ancestry to Arab immigrants, rose in revolt, first against the Government and then against their Hindu landlords. An "independent Muslim state" was declared, murder and arson took place, and some Hindus were forcibly converted to Islam. The Raj moved thousands of troops into the area and a full-scale military action followed in which 2,339 Moplahs were killed. The figures, however, were not known until much later. The rebelling

Moplahs had a long history of violence and had never seen Gandhi or the Ali brothers; the Khilafat stir in the rest of India was not the main impulse that drove them to their folly. Inevitably, however, the Raj linked the grisly episode to "the incitements of Mohamed Ali, Shaukat Ali and those who think like them", ¹³⁸ and used it to undermine the bridge across the Hindu-Muslim divide. Accounts of forced conversion during the Moplah outbreak spread elsewhere in the country; though at times exaggerated, they contained a kernel of truth. Movements for strengthening the Hindu community were launched in reaction; some of these movements, in turn, caused disquiet among Muslims.

The advance of the Gandhi engine was not arrested by the Malabar news, which took time, as we have noted, to reach the rest of India and was not perceived as a spin-off of non-cooperation. A dramatic new item was inaugurated on August 1, the first anniversary of Tilak's death: bonfires of foreign cloth. Tagore was again troubled, and also the Mahatma's close friend Charlie Andrews. Wearing khadi himself, Andrews protested that the flames were destroying useful and beautiful objects. The Mahatma replied that using cloth made in foreign mills destroyed the Indian destitute's chance to earn by spinning and weaving. He also claimed that the bonfires diverted the Indian public's hatred from individual Britons to inanimate things.

Once more Vallabhbhai was on his general's side. He backed his affirmative with all of his barrister's wardrobe: gowns, suits, shirts, ties and collars. The Ahmedabad and Bombay bonfires were the country's largest. The clothes that Patel tossed into the fire were followed by a torrent of garments from others. "A ceaseless flow of foreign clothing and caps fed the fire."¹³⁹ For some reason Vallabhbhai's foreign cap was not offered to the Ahmedabad flames; he sacrificed it, instead, to a bonfire in Umreth, one of Kheda's towns. A few days later, while visiting Godhra with the Mahatma, Patel switched to khadi. Until his death he would never again wear a mill-made garment. Mani and Dahya had made the change before him, and Mani had wondered for months why her father, the Mahatma's close friend and second-in-command, had not taken to khadi when thousands in Gujarat had. But she did not ask him. However, Mani decided that she would spin yarn for her father's dhotis. From 1921 onwards most of Vallabhbhai's dhotis and kurtas were woven out of Mani's yarn. And from 1927 – right until his death – all the yarn covering his body was spun by Manibehn. If lips, or a pen, could express love, so could a spindle.

For Mani the new life meant more than a switch to khadi. In 1921 the 17-year-old girl wrapped all her jewels in a bundle of cloth, told her father that she was giving them to Gandhi and deposited the bundle at the Ashram. Father made no protest. A pair of gold bangles

given by her aunt Dahiba, a gold wristwatch that Vithalkaka had brought for her from England, a pair of earrings and four bangles that Mavlankar's mother Gopikabehn had persuaded Mani to acquire, all went into the cause of Indian liberty.¹⁴⁰

* * *

Reading, the new Viceroy, had once been Attorney General Rufus Isaacs before he was made a Lord. In May 1921 he and the Mahatma had six talks for a total of 13 hours; Gandhi's war against the empire allowed for such exercises. In a letter home Lord Reading recorded his reactions:

*He is convinced to a point almost bordering on fanaticism that non-violence and love will give India its independence and enable it to withstand the British government.... Our conversations were of the frankest; he was supremely courteous with manners of distinction.*¹⁴¹

Also consistent with non-cooperation, said Gandhi, was the unveiling by him of portraits of Lord Hardinge, the former Viceroy to whom Vallabhbhai had positively referred in his August 1920 speech, and Lady Hardinge. The Mahatma claimed that the gesture, which had taken place in February, showed that "non-cooperation is not anti-British and that good deeds done by anyone, English or Indian, are treasured in our memory".¹⁴² To safeguard his movement's non-violent character, and also to allay Hindu anxieties, Gandhi asked the Ali brothers to express regret "for the unnecessary heat" of some of their remarks. When the brothers heeded Gandhi and publicly announced their regrets, Montagu, the Secretary of State, conveyed a shrewd assessment to Reading:

*I can only believe they (the Ali brothers) made the recantation because Gandhi insisted. They avoided a breach between them and Gandhi by their recantation but it must have left very unpleasant thoughts in their minds which are all to the good.*¹⁴³

Decline, meanwhile, was overtaking the Sultan of Turkey, the man India's Muslims were willing to die for. Emerging as Turkey's man of destiny and setting up a government of his own, Mustafa Kamal spoke contemptuously of the Sultan, whose government then sentenced Mustafa Kamal to death. In February Gandhi had joined Muhammad Ali in an appeal to the Sultan to enlist the partnership of Kamal, who was winning battles against British-supported Greeks. In July India's Khilafatists, led by the Ali brothers, met in Karachi,

considered the likelihood of Britain “resuming hostilities against (Mustafa Kamal’s) government of Angora” and gave their verdict that “in the present circumstances the Holy Shariat forbids every Muslim to serve or enlist himself in the British Army”.¹⁴⁴ For this sedition the Ali brothers were arrested, tried and sentenced. At the trial Muhammad Ali argued that the Koran had commanded his conduct: he had to choose Khilafat over the King. What Muhammad Ali did not know at the time was that Mustafa Kamal, the man for whose sake he was inviting Muslims to leave the Army, intended to destroy Khilafat.

Muhammad Ali’s arrest took place on September 14 in Waltair in southern India while he and Gandhi were on their way to Malabar, which they wanted to visit because of the Moplah outbreak. To the Mahatma his Muslim ally’s arrest was the signal for raising the tempo. He used strong words:

*The Ali brothers were charged with having tampered with the loyalty of the sepoy and with having uttered sedition.... But sedition has become the creed of the Congress. Every non-cooperator is pledged to preach disaffection.... But this is no new discovery. Lord Chelmsford knew it. Lord Reading knows it. We ask for no quarter; we expect none from the government. We must spread disaffection openly and systematically till it pleases the government to arrest us.*¹⁴⁵

On October 5 Vallabhbhai joined the Mahatma and several others, including Das, the Nehrus, Lajpat Rai, Rajagopalachari and Sarojini Naidu, in issuing a manifesto that said that it was “the duty of every Indian soldier and civilian to sever his connection with the Government”.¹⁴⁶

The Mahatma and his team made two other decisions. There would be a boycott of an Indian tour by the Prince of Wales, announced for November. Secondly, and this would be the climax, mass civil disobedience would start in a selected area. Taxes would be withheld, not, as in 1918, for economic reasons, but to press for Swaraj.

Where? After consulting Vallabhbhai and Vithalbhai, the Mahatma concluded that the honour of offering the first battle should go either to Surat district’s Bardoli taluka or, jointly, to Bardoli and Kheda district’s Anand taluka. While Anand was Vallabhbhai’s home ground, Bardoli had several national schools and eager, disciplined satyagrahis, including quite a few who had taken part in the Mahatma’s South African campaigns. A Patidar activist from Bardoli called Kunverji Mehta had been pressing the Mahatma from 1915 to “lead and use” Bardoli; at the 1920 Nagpur session he had entered a promise to himself in his diary that he and Bardoli would risk

everything for liberty.¹⁴⁷ Kunverji's brother Kalyanji argued that since Surat district had been the first to give hospitality to the British, it should lead in saying farewell to them.

The claims of Anand, on the other hand, were persuasively advanced by Abbas Tyabji, a venerable ex-judge and president of the Kheda district Congress committee: "Whatever your conditions may be, everyone of us is prepared to fulfil them. Only tell us what they are. In my old age I have literally worn myself out, visiting people in their homes to preach to them the gospel of the spinning wheel. The flag of Satyagraha was unfurled in Kheda and in the course of that struggle the people of Anand taluka received their training."¹⁴⁸ The Patel brothers tested the soil and advised Gandhi that though both places held promise, Bardoli was likely to show greater unity and adherence to non-violence. Vallabhbhai evidently felt that the Kheda Patidars were brave but also vain and divided by jealousies.¹⁴⁹ Early in November, after the Ali brothers had been sentenced to two years' rigorous imprisonment, Gandhi wrote in *Young India*:

*When the Swaraj flag floats victoriously at Bardoli, then the people of the taluka next to Bardoli should seek to plant the flag of Swaraj in their midst. Thus, district by district,... throughout the length and breadth of India, should the Swaraj flag be hoisted.*¹⁵⁰

Simultaneously, Gandhi warned that "violence in any part of the country" could lead to a stoppage of the movement. The warning was necessary. On November 17, the day the Prince of Wales landed in Bombay, a great majority stayed away from the ceremonies of welcome. However, some – mostly Parsis, Anglo-Indians and Jews – did not. They became a target of mob fury. The saris of a few Parsi women emerging from a reception in the Prince's honour were pulled and torn. Foreign caps donned by some men were seized and burnt. Liquor shops, mostly Parsi-owned, were smashed. Constables were murdered with lathis. There were counter-attacks, clashes and police firing. In five days of rioting 58 were killed, of whom 53 were Hindus or Muslims. Gandhi was in Bombay and saw some of the violence with his own eyes. He confronted the rioters in the streets, declared that the Swaraj he had witnessed "stank in his nostrils", added that "Hindu-Muslim unity has been a menace to the handful of Parsis, Christians and Jews",¹⁵¹ and went on a fast which ended the rioting. He also indefinitely postponed the Bardoli and Anand battles; meeting in Ahmedabad at the end of December, Congress would consider the question afresh.

But the boycott of the Prince was maintained. In town after town the Raj's royal guest moved past closed doors and windows and along empty streets. A resentful Raj banned meetings and the recruitment

of volunteers and arrested non-cooperators all across the country. By the end of the year almost 30,000 were behind bars, including Chitta Ranjan Das, who was to preside at Ahmedabad, Lajpat Rai, Motilal and Jawaharlal, Rajagopalachari, Abul Kalam Azad and Subhas Bose. In the middle of December, Reading, Malaviya and the incarcerated Das considered a gambit for peace, or at least a truce. If it came about, at least Calcutta, where by tradition the Viceroy spent the Christmas season, would give the Prince a fitting welcome. It involved a deal: the Raj would release most prisoners and lift its bans, Gandhi would call off the boycott and the Bardoli and Anand plans, and a committee would look into India's grievances once the Prince had left.

Backed by Abul Kalam Azad, Das urged the Mahatma to accept the terms. Gandhi's reply was that he could only do so with two provisos: the Ali brothers and those arrested with them should be among the released; and there should be agreement beforehand on the composition and date of appointment of the grievances committee. The provisos were turned down by Reading, and the gambit collapsed.

* * *

What was Vallabhbhai's role while his general developed his initiatives and responses or criss-crossed India? He was not, outside Gujarat, Gandhi's travelling companion. Apart from Muhammad Ali, who shared numerous platforms with the Mahatma before his arrest, no other leader was a constant figure at Gandhi's side. Das had mobilised Bengal, Motilal the U.P., Lajpat Rai the Punjab, Rajendra Prasad and a notable colleague of his called Brij Kishore Prasad worked Bihar up. Rajagopalachari enrolled the Tamil country. And Vallabhbhai took care of Gujarat. He undertook to produce results there, not to assist or advise the Mahatma on national strategy. He would raise funds, recruit fighters, reconcile differences and rally the public, which literally wore its new faith on its sleeves. Wrote an onlooker at a meeting in early October 1921 in a village outside Surat: "It was a monster gathering of some fifty-thousand people. In whatever direction I cast my eyes, I could only see khadi caps and khadi shirts. Never before had I seen such a vast assemblage of people clad only in khaddar."¹⁵² After a few more expressions of this kind, Bardoli and Anand would follow in India's first essay in mass civil disobedience. Vallabhbhai was content with this agenda.

An incident occurring in the village of Varad in Bardoli taluka reveals an aspect of Vallabhbhai's role at this juncture. One evening in 1921 a teacher called Makanjibhai, who taught in Varad's national

school and also campaigned against liquor, was beaten up by a liquor-seller named Jehangir. After Makanjibhai had come to and related what had happened to him, the villagers of Varad marched towards Jehangir's house, which they intended to burn down. An old woman stopped them. "What will you feel when Mahatmaji comes to know?" she shouted. Informed of the tension, Kunverji Mehta rushed down from Bardoli and urged the villagers to do nothing to Jehangir until Vallabhbhai arrived. They agreed. To ensure that Patel would arrive, Kunverji printed a leaflet announcing a meeting two days later in Varad to be addressed by Vallabhbhai, and, along with a plea, sent the leaflet to Patel.

In the leaflet Vallabhbhai was described, probably for the first time, as the "suba" (ruler or chief) of Gujarat, an expression used by many in Gujarat until 1928, when he would be called the Sardar. Patel came to the meeting that Kunverji had fixed without consulting him, summoned Jehangir to it, had him sit next to a heavily-bandaged Makanjibhai, bade Jehangir seek Makanjibhai's pardon, which Jehangir did, and asked the villagers seated in front of him to pardon Jehangir, which, reluctantly or not, they agreed to do. "This way," recalls Kunverji, "Vallabhbhai brought back to its rails a train that was about to slip off."¹⁵³

Patel did, of course, join several get-togethers on all-India questions but rarely to speak at them. Word spread that here was a doer rather than a talker. When Krishnadas, a talented Bengali who worked with the Mahatma in 1921-22, saw Vallabhbhai for the first time in October 1921 in Bombay, where several leaders had gathered following Muhammad Ali's arrest, he could not understand how one who "was so grave-looking, and spoke so little, had managed to rise to the position of a leader of such eminence". Soon, however, Krishnadas was contrasting Patel with leaders whose "political work began and ended in speech-making".¹⁵⁴ Krishnadas observed, too, that at one round of talks "Jawaharlal Nehru was sitting quietly by the side of Mahatmaji, reading that day's *Bombay Chronicle*". Seeing Gandhiji mentioned as "Mahatma Gandhi" in an Assam Government communique, Jawaharlal "said with a laugh, 'This is perhaps the first time that a Government communique calls him a Mahatma.'"¹⁵⁵

Though older than Jawaharlal by 14 years, Vallabhbhai would not have dreamt, with senior men such as Motilal Nehru, Lajpat Rai and Maulana Abdul Bari (preceptor to the Ali brothers) present, of occupying a place next to the Mahatma. Young Jawaharlal, on the other hand, found it entirely natural not only to seat himself beside the Mahatma but also to read a newspaper while doing so and to share an amusing thought with the company. We will see in due course that Vallabhbhai was more than capable of sharing jokes with Gandhi and

of poking fun at him, but reserve and modesty would overtake Patel when he and Gandhi were in the midst of others.

Most of the men who joined the Bombay deliberations were in prison by the end of 1921. For fear of uncontrollable unrest the Mahatma was not touched; and Vallabhbhai was not arrested because the Raj calculated that putting him behind bars could hasten the Bardoli and Anand rebellion. Patel was left free, therefore, to prepare the two talukas, and free also to host leaders and delegates coming from all over India to Ahmedabad for the end-of-the-year Congress session. But we will postpone a view of that session and of the revolt to follow until we have looked at Vallabhbhai's bid, begun in 1920, to detach Ahmedabad's primary schools from the structure of the Raj.

* * *

His professed aim in this exercise was to curtail the Raj's "freedom to develop the minds of our children" in an alien way,¹⁵⁶ but a stronger motive was to carve out autonomy in at least one area. His opening move, in October 1920, was to encourage two teachers to urge the city board to free the schools where they taught from Government control. The two teachers told the city board that they would resign if the schools remained governmental. Armed with these messages, Patel proposed in February 1921 that the city board should turn down the Raj's educational grant, which came to 50 per cent of what the city spent on its schools. The tide of non-cooperation was running strong and the board voted to reject the Raj's money. The Raj's inspectors were told to cease inspecting the schools, and the Raj's examiners asked to cease arranging examinations in them.

When the Collector notified the municipality in writing that its action was *ultra vires*, Vallabhbhai proposed that "the letter should be filed".¹⁵⁷ His suggestion was accepted, and the Collector informed that the municipality was only complying with the wishes of the tax-paying public. The Government then said that an official would examine the accounts of the city board's school committee. It was told that the city committee need not show its accounts when it was not taking the Raj's money. The Raj's riposte – in the form of a directive from the Director of Public Instruction – was to transfer the 300 municipal teachers to the Government. Assured by Vallabhbhai that the municipality would safeguard their pay and pension, 297 teachers chose to stay where they were.

Receiving his salary from the Raj's education department, the superintendent of municipal schools, a man called P. K. Desai, was then instructed to "revert immediately to the department".¹⁵⁸ Desai

chose to resign from the Raj's service and stay as a city employee. The Ahmedabad example was emulated by municipal councillors in Surat and Nadiad. In October 1921, however, they and Vallabhbhai faced an old adversary, Frederick Pratt, posted again as Commissioner of the Northern Division. With Gandhi and Patel planning rebellion, Gujarat needed a seasoned hand. Pratt warned the municipalities that funds diverted to pay teachers might be recovered from individual councillors. The threat did not seem to work; Vallabhbhai still had his colleagues' support. Soon Bombay's education minister under the Reforms Act, Sir Raghunath Paranjpe, arrived in Ahmedabad and sounded Patel about a compromise. "What happens," asked Vallabhbhai, "if you and I come to a settlement but the Governor does not accept it?" That of course was the nub of the matter. Notwithstanding the Reforms Act, a Governor from a distant island was still the boss. But Paranjpe was put out by the candour. Muttering dislike of Patel's "impertinence", he returned to Bombay.¹⁵⁹

Pratt now "directed" the municipality to hand over the schools to the Raj. Not only that; the municipality was also required, within seven days, to send Rs 72,000 to enable the Raj's education department to run the schools. This was on December 17. To make it difficult for the Raj to take possession, Vallabhbhai had all the schools closed for a month's holiday. Simultaneously, the schools committee called Pratt's directive illegal and requested the city board not to part with the Rs 72,000. But Pratt had influence where it mattered – in the Imperial Bank, where the municipality kept its funds. He had Rs 72,000 moved from the municipality's account into a new account of the education department!

Clever move, but the teachers refused to take their salaries from the education department. Patel lashed out at "the conspiracy" between the Commissioner and the Bank and spoke of "looted money".¹⁶⁰ He also arranged, less noisily, to have Rs 10,000 taken out in the early hours of the following day from the municipal treasury. From this sum, almost immediately after they had rejected "looted money", the teachers received their December salaries. Unable to isolate or outwit Vallabhbhai, Pratt finally used, on February 9, 1922, an unanswerable weapon: he suspended the Ahmedabad municipality. Pratt "won" but Patel had not lost. Teachers and parents had stood by him, while the Raj's attitude estranged its friends. If the moves and counter-moves of the tussle revealed Vallabhbhai's agility and his determination to win, it also disclosed an ability to confine a battle to one front. No detractor could accuse him of non-cooperating with the Government over lighting, sanitation or water.

A wild rumour circulated in Ahmedabad shortly before the Congress session began: at the Raj's behest, a Colonel Rana Pratap from the nearby principality of Idar would ride up on the opening day and shoot everybody once the Mahatma and Patel had raised the national flag. In fact Gandhi and Vallabhbhai had been assured by the police superintendent that the Raj's forces would stay out of the Congress area. So they did. On December 27, as the session began in Khadi Nagar on the bank of the Sabarmati, khadi-clad Congress youths guided traffic and kept order.

As the GPCC chief, Patel headed the reception committee. He and Mavlankar, the committee's secretary, saw to every detail involved in a three-day camp of ten thousand men and women. The ground was levelled and topped with a layer of river sand. The huge pandal for the plenaries was of khadi, as were the rugs on which the delegates squatted, each putting his shoes or chappals into a khadi bag sold to him. "Thousands of yards of khadi were thus sold, and people had no anxiety regarding their footwear being stolen, and there was no unseemly scramble for shoes at the end of each meeting."¹⁶¹ Sanitation was "excellent but simple". Specially constructed water works gave a sufficient flow of water. Specially laid drains took it away after use. Large kitchens turned out palatable meals, and delegates slept on khadi rugs under tents. Those with westernised habits were put up and victualled in city hotels. In Khadi Nagar, Gujarati girls "served competently as volunteers".

No Indian gathering of ten thousand folk can escape a festival flavour. Not far from the pandal, Vishnu Digambar Paluskar led a display of Indian music. Spinning, weaving and other stages of cloth-making were performed under another adjacent shamiana. Having raised money for the session with zest, Vallabhbhai spent it with care. When the Congress ended, he had enough left over to build Congress House at Bhadra .

The session's participants believed they were witnesses and agents of history. Fear of the Raj had departed. Hindu-Muslim unity had arrived. Khadi had merged delegates from elite backgrounds with the Indian peasant. Swaraj was round the corner. Yet tension was high. Das, the president-elect, was behind bars. So was his wife. So were scores of stalwarts and thousands of the faithful. Journals were being penalised for their views. For bringing out, in Allahabad, an unregistered issue of the *Independent*, which scores of volunteers hand-copied, Mahadev Desai had been given one year rigorous. And a great clash loomed ahead. To the intense disappointment of old Abbas Tyabji, Gandhi's senior by 16 years, Ahmedabad resolved,

heeding the opinion of Vallabhbhai and Vithalbhai, that Bardoli alone would offer mass disobedience. The Mahatma was vested with complete authority to decide on dates and other details. Hakim Ajmal Khan took the chair in Das's absence, and Vallabhbhai surprised everybody by the brevity of his written-out address and by its language – Hindi. Said the chairman of the reception committee:

It has pleased the Almighty to make us endure yet more hardships and troubles, no doubt to test our mettle all the more, and to make us appreciate, and be better fitted for, the precious gift of Swaraj.

Non-violence has been inculcated into the people of Gujarat, a non-violence born not of weakness or cowardice but of self-restraint. The Government's [actions] against the national schools of Surat, Nadiad and Ahmedabad have only provided an opportunity to the people to demonstrate their strength.

[The people] of Bardoli are making intensive preparations for independence. I am confident that with God's good grace Gujarat will find the strength to face the ordeal successfully.¹⁶²

* * *

Though he had walked out a year earlier at Nagpur, Jinnah came to the Ahmedabad Congress, hoping, in coordination with Malaviya and the Liberal leader, M. R. Jayakar, to arrange a truce between Gandhi and the Raj. Acting on Jinnah's suggestion, the Mahatma attended an All Parties Conference in Bombay on January 15. The meeting asked Gandhi to postpone Bardoli; the Government was urged to release its prisoners, withdraw its bans and convene a Round Table Conference. Gandhi put off Bardoli till February 1 but Viceroy Reading rejected the Bombay proposals. Bardoli was ready. Government bodies in this taluka in the district of Surat had been "almost completely boycotted".¹⁶³ As many as 51 of the taluka's 80 towns and villages boasted national schools, all set up in the preceding 18 months. An impressive proportion of residents had taken to spinning. A warning that Bardoli's standing crop, worth at least a million rupees, would be confiscated if revenue was withheld did not frighten the expectant satyagrahis.

The Mahatma asked Vithalbhai to scan the territory once more. The older Patel found that 75 per cent of Bardoli's Patidars, who in turn comprised a third of the total population, were "wholeheartedly in favour of the struggle". The more numerous "Dublas and other Raniparaj", as Vithalbhai described them, made up half the population. They had not yet been won over by Congress, but "their relationship with the Patidars is such," said Vithalbhai, "that they will do whatever the Patidars ask them to do". The taluka's 3,000 Muslims, 3 1/2 per cent of the population, were at one with the Hindus, while the latter, Vithalbhai added, were getting rid of untouchability. Given these factors and the

taluka's low crime rate, it was reasonable to expect that "order and non-violence will be maintained".¹⁶⁴

The Mahatma and Vithalbhai addressed Bardoli-ites on January 30. Obeying the non-cooperation call, Vithalbhai had stayed out of the end-1920 elections. He told the gathering that the Government could seize not just the crop that was standing but also cattle, ornaments and land. But if the peasants took the risk, India's independence might follow. The Mahatma said that Swaraj would come not through a show of hands but through a readiness to hand over property and face death, if need be.

Vallabhbhai was once more the doer. He did not speak. Instead, he "occupied himself in studying the people very carefully".¹⁶⁵ The gathering resolved that they would not pay revenue unless and until the Mahatma asked them to. Gandhi too was true to type. On February 1 he sent Reading an ultimatum. In seven days prisoners should be released, bans lifted and Congress allowed to work without let or hindrance for Swaraj and Khilafat. If this did not happen, rebellion would start. The Viceroy replied that the Raj would not surrender. Gandhi, now issuing a leaflet a day to his soldiers, sent Reading a rejoinder. But before war could be declared the Mahatma was, in his words, "stabbed in the back". He called the whole thing off.

What happened? On February 5 a small police party with little ammunition had fired at a procession of non-cooperators in an obscure place called Chauri Chaura in eastern U.P. When their ammunition was exhausted the policemen took refuge in their outpost. Violent men in the procession set fire to the outpost and hacked the fleeing constables to pieces. In gruesome deeds 22 policemen were killed. The news struck the Mahatma dumb. He felt God had spoken. A voice tempted him to press on:

*"But what about your manifesto to the Viceroy and your rejoinder to his reply?" spoke the voice of Satan. It was the bitterest cup of humiliation to drink. "Surely it is cowardly to withdraw the next day after pompous threats to the Government and promises to the people of Bardoli." Thus Satan's invitation was to deny Truth,...to deny God himself.*¹⁶⁶

Obeying his Truth, Gandhi halted the revolt. He would rather fail than "lead his people along the old paths of bloodshed and terror and cheated hope".¹⁶⁷ But the 30,000 who were in prison thanks to him were not prepared to be shocked. Gandhi's decision stunned and humiliated them. Lajpat Rai and Motilal Nehru sent him angry letters. C.R.'s jailor in Vellore roused him before dawn with the taunt, "Get up! Non-cooperation has gone to sleep." C.R. did not protest to the Mahatma but in his diary he noted:

*In spite of my tenderest and most complete attachment to my master and the ideal he stands for, I fail to see why there should be a call for stopping our struggle for birthrights [because of] every distant and unconnected outburst.*¹⁶⁸

Some days earlier, thinking of the imminent action in Bardoli, C.R. had written in his diary, "Victory is nigh." Now he, and thousands of others, saw dark defeat. That Gandhi and his soldiers were not far from success was also the view of some in the Raj. Talking to a British journalist in November 1923, Lord Lloyd, Governor of Bombay when Bardoli was called off, would give the following assessment:

*He gave us a scare. His programme filled our gaols. You can't go on arresting people for ever, you know, not when there are 320 million of them, and if they had taken his next step and refused to pay our taxes, God knows where we should have been. Gandhi's was the most colossal experiment in the world's history, and it came within an inch of succeeding. But he couldn't control men's passions. They became violent, and he called off his programme.*¹⁶⁹

Vithalbhai emphatically disagreed with Gandhi's decision. The incarcerated Jawaharlal was upset. Before long Jawaharlal and Rajagopalachari would reconcile themselves to the suspension. "Our movement, in spite of its apparent power, was going to pieces," Jawaharlal would write. "All organisation and discipline was disappearing.... Gandhiji's decision was right. He had to stop the rot and build anew."¹⁷⁰ The only two who did not question Gandhi were Vallabhbhai and Rajendra Prasad. According to Narhari, Patel "accepted Gandhi's decision without a word of opposition or criticism".¹⁷¹ Weighty though this testimony is, coming from one who was a witness to Vallabhbhai's acceptance, it is silent about Patel's interior feelings.

Given the context of his words at Congress's Ahmedabad session, and of his tussle over the schools with Frederick Pratt, it is improbable that Vallabhbhai took the suspension without an inner rebellion. It was on February 6, 7 and 8 that a bruised Gandhi was appraising Chauri Chaura. On February 6 Patel heard about Pratt's "loot" of the municipality money; early next morning, i.e. on February 7, Vallabhbhai had Rs 10,000 removed from the municipal treasury. Pratt's stratagem and Patel's counter were not unemotional moves in a game of chess; they represented a duel between two proud and passionate spirits, each indignant about the other's ways, each representing a race, a nation and a cause.

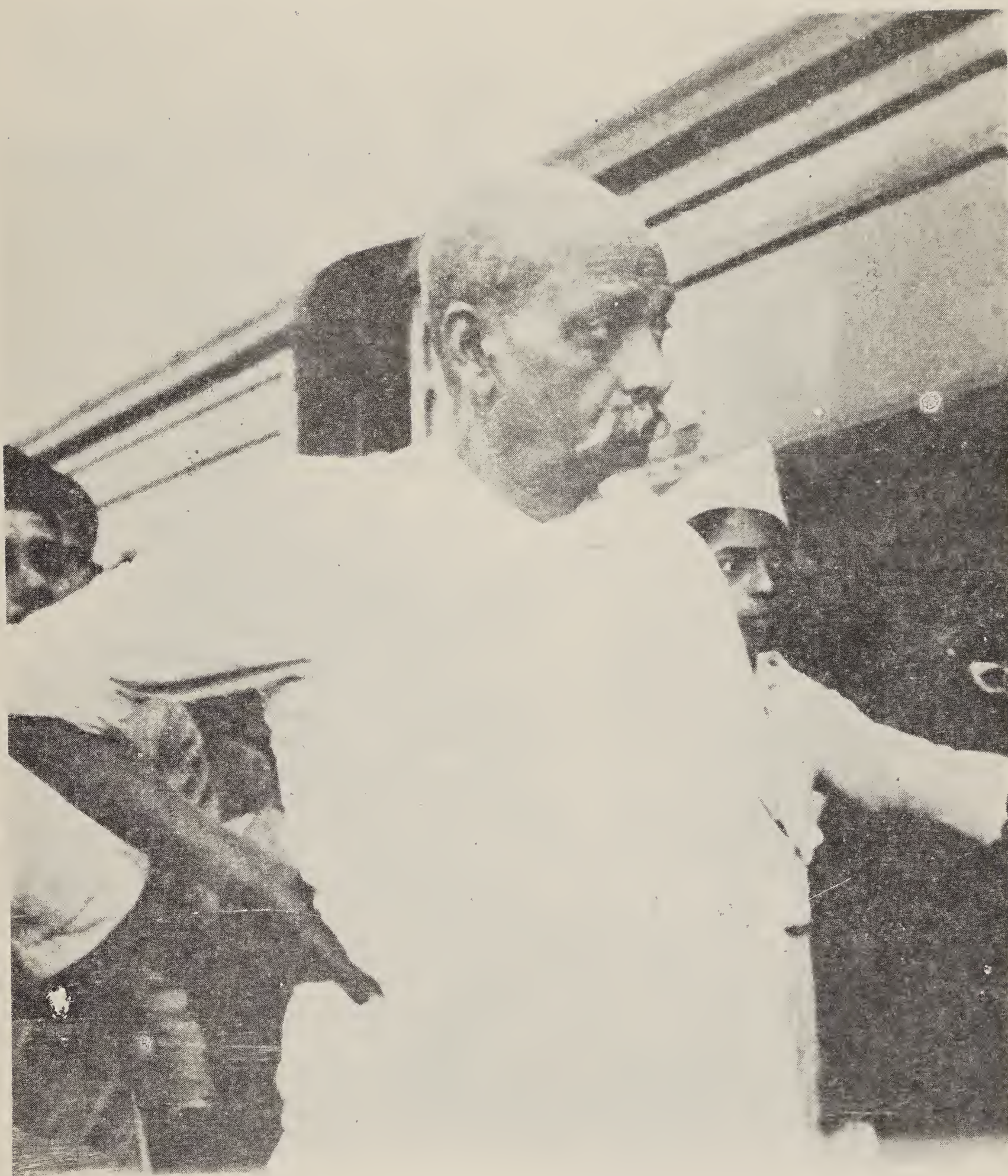
In the second week of February 1922, Vallabhbhai, wishing "to rouse the whole of India" on the question of the "loot",¹⁷² would



In his teens (top) and as a young pleader



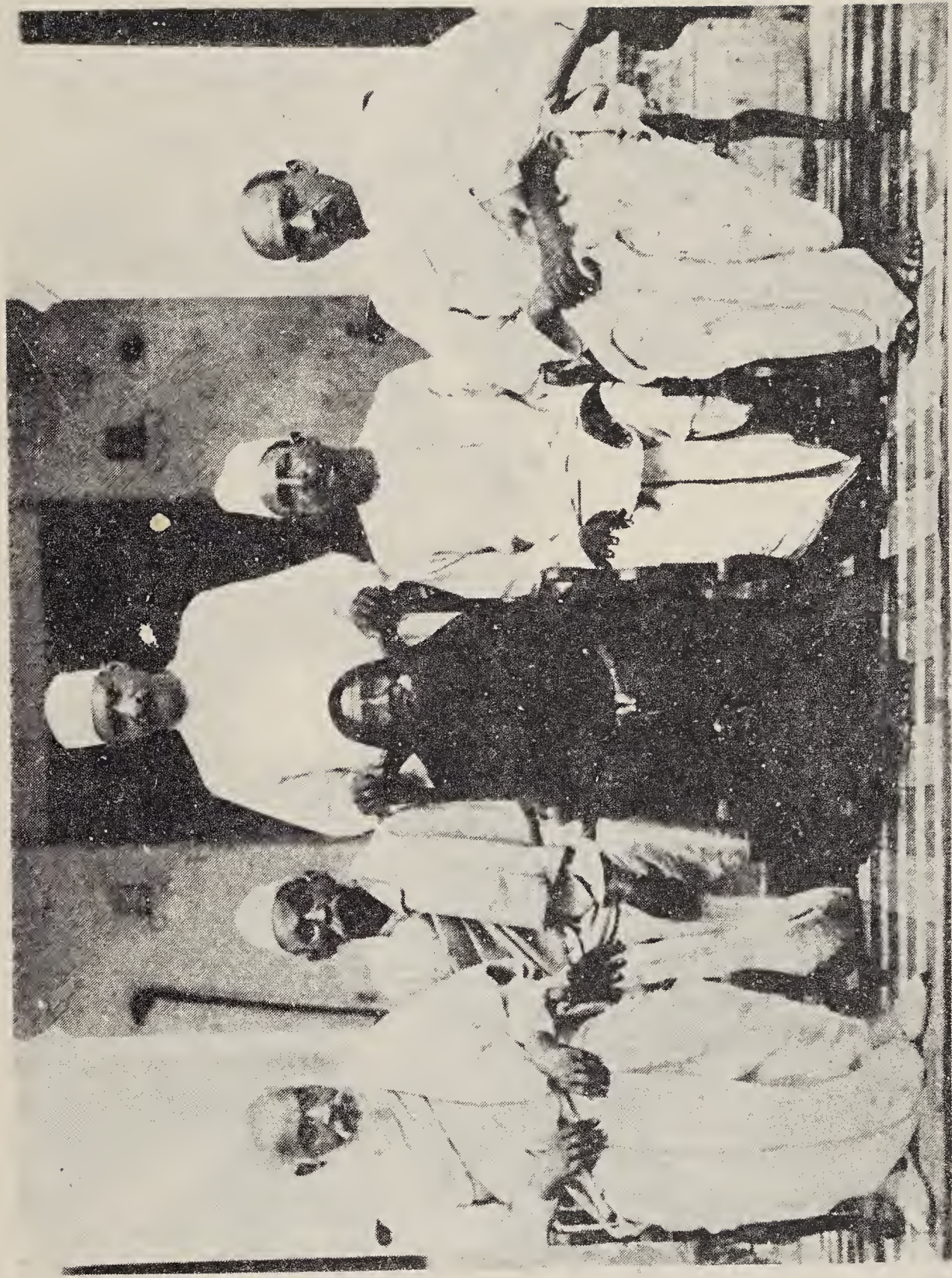
Barrister brothers Vithalbhai (left) and Vallabhbai



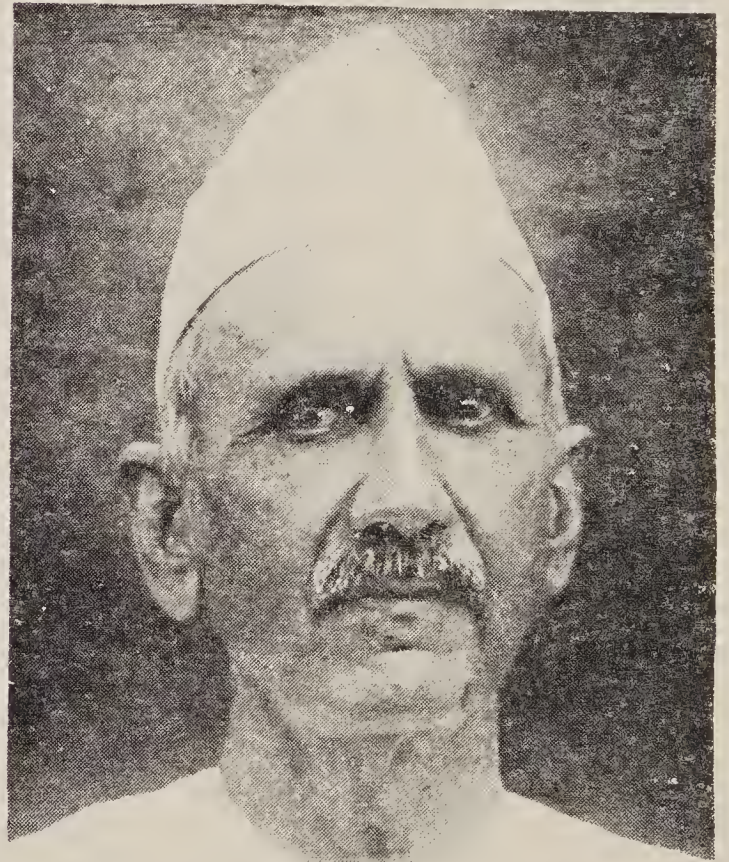
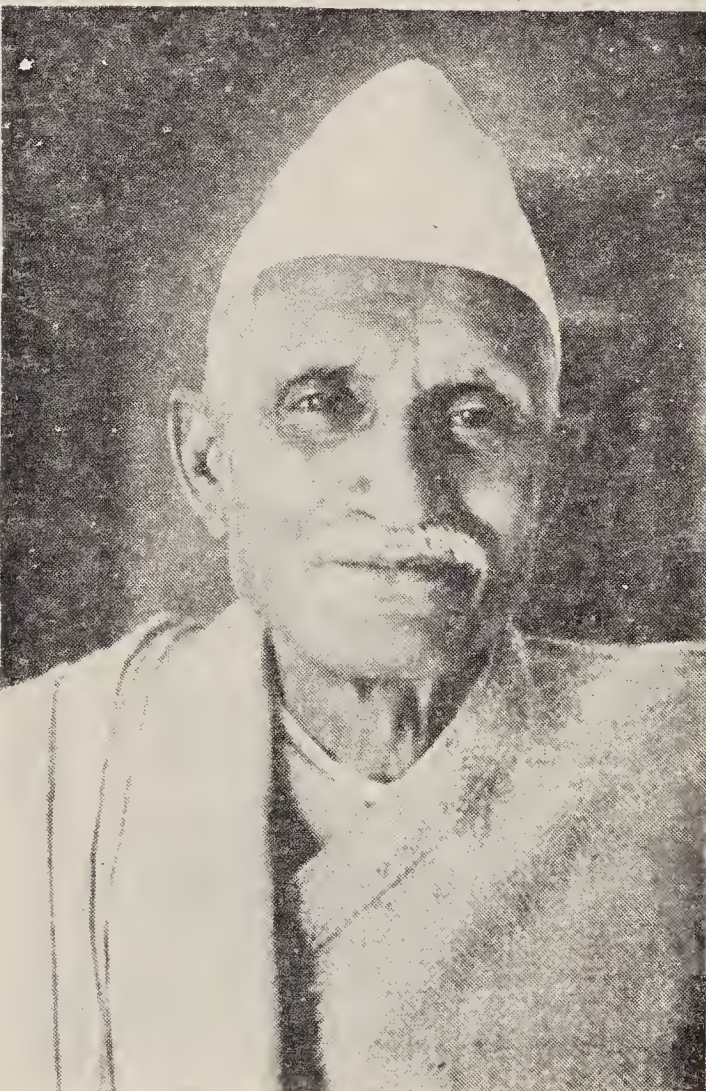
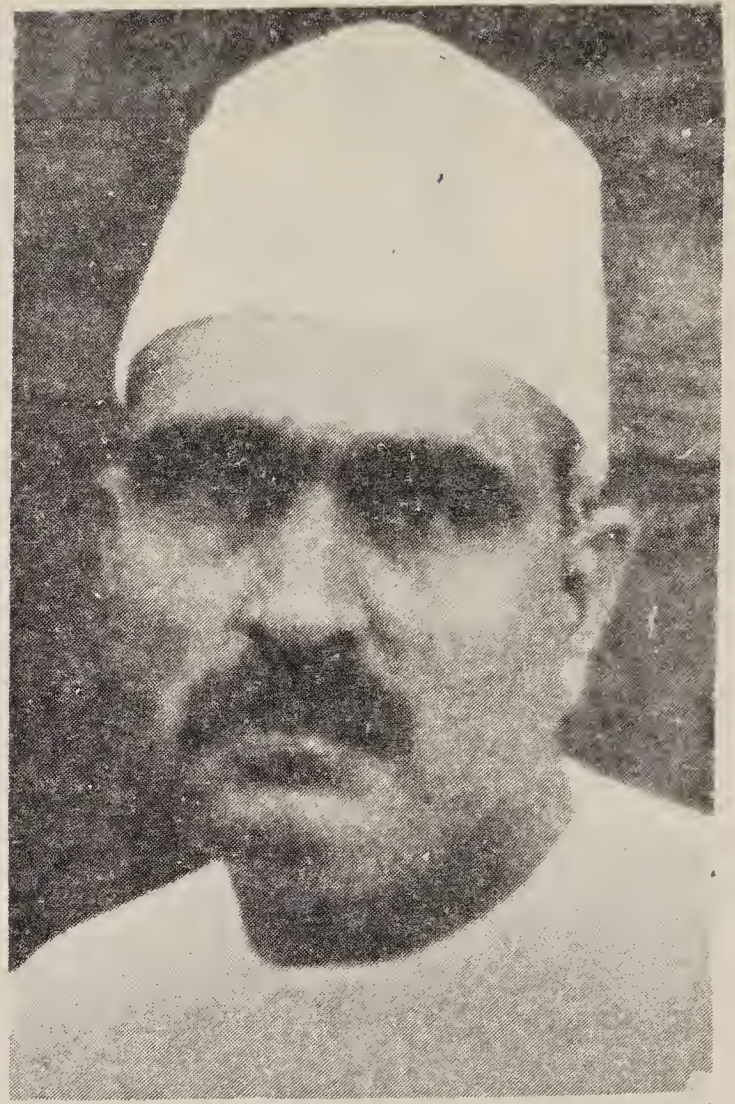
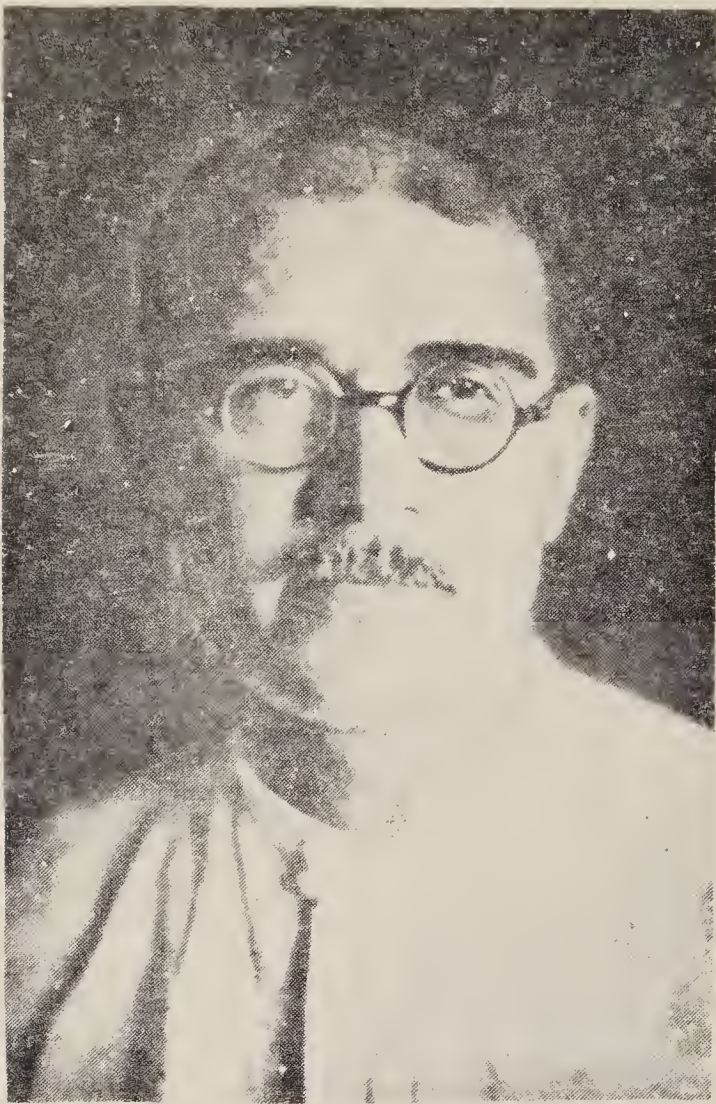
Bardoli's Sardar



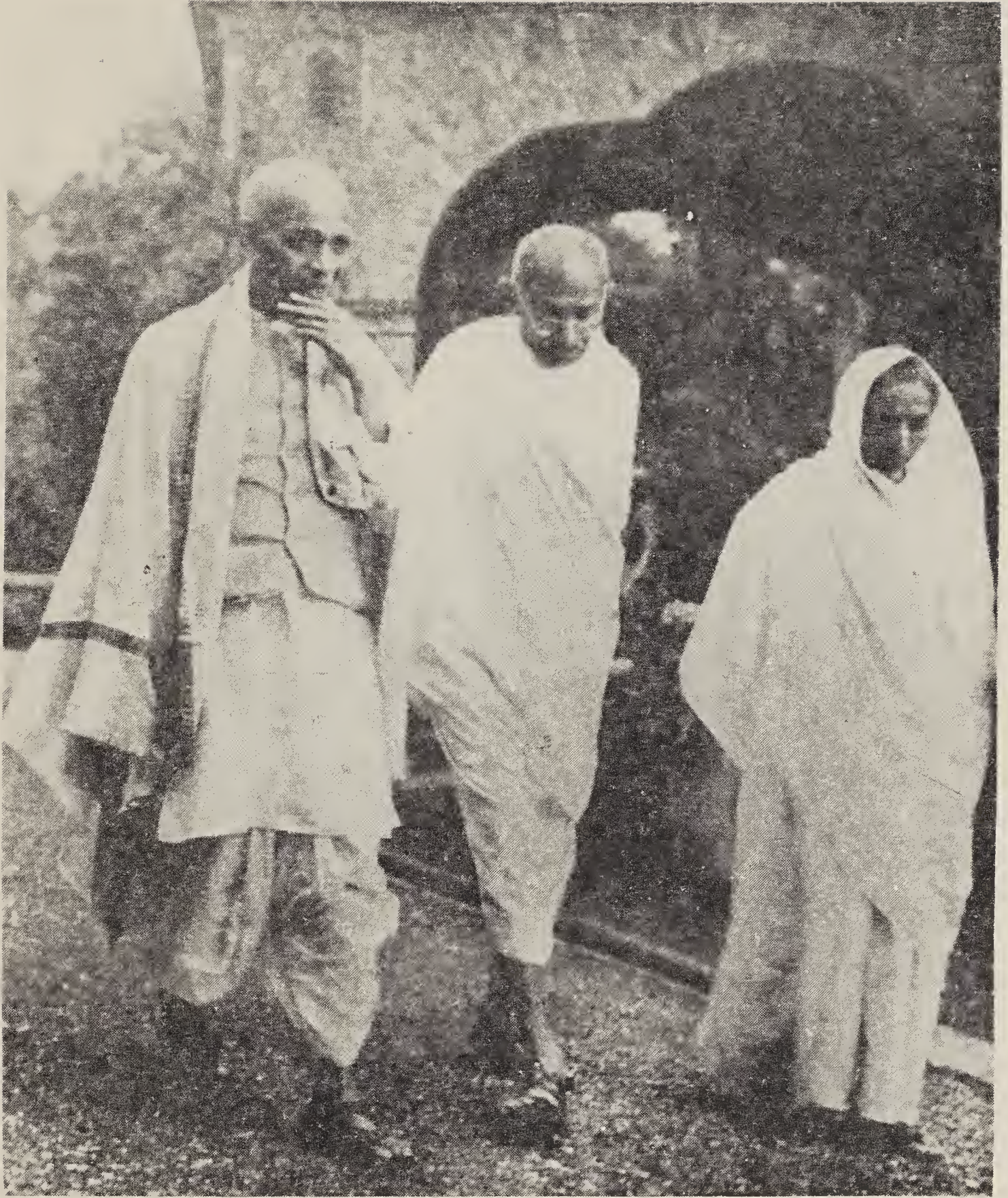
In the late 1920s



*Ladba with her sons (from left) Vithalbai, Somabhai
Kashibhai, Narsibhai and Vallabhbai in 1927*



Four key associates. Clockwise from top left, Mahadev Desai, Narhari Parikh, Mohanlal Pandya and Ravishankar Vyas



Sardar, Bapu and Manibehn



The June 2, 1947 meeting accepting the independence and partition of India. Clockwise after Patel are Nehru, Mountbatten, Jinnah, Liaquat Ali, Abdur Rab Nishtar, Baldev Singh and Kripalani

have been less receptive than ever to the idea of a stoppage of Bardoli. Patel was doubtless more aware than those inside prison of the indiscipline that showed its face alongside the Indian public's enthusiasm, but this indiscipline was not a strong element in Gujarat and not an element at all in Bardoli. Putting off the struggle must, therefore, have been a struggle for Vallabhbhai, and a sacrifice. But the trust of Jawaharlal – who could muse, even while reacting against the suspension, that “after all Gandhi was the author and originator of (satyagraha), and who could be a better judge?”¹⁷³ – and the loyalty that Rajagopalachari wrote into his diary were present in Patel's spirit in equal if not greater measure. When Gandhi included him in his agonizing, a profoundly saddened Vallabhbhai would have said, “You know best,” or, “It is your business.” He could not have said, “You are right.” Five weeks later, however, writing in *Navajivan*, the Gujarati counterpart of *Young India*, he would refer to the Mahatma's “clear vision” and say in so many words that the stoppage was right.¹⁷⁴

Gandhi had not consulted Vallabhbhai or Vithalbhai. That word would be too strong for the exercise undertaken. What Gandhi had done was described by him in a *Young India* article:

*I put my doubts and troubles before the Working Committee and other associates whom I found near me. They did not all agree with me at first. Some of them probably do not even now agree with me. But...they understood my difficulty and patiently followed my argument.*¹⁷⁵

After announcing the suspension the Mahatma went on a five-day fast as penance for “the crime of Chauri Chaura”. Not without grumblings, the AICC, greatly depleted by prison-going, ratified the suspension. Hitherto the Raj had not only refrained from arresting Gandhi, it had also avoided offensive criticism. It was afraid that even the Moderates, and Indians in the police and the army, would object to the move. The suspension emboldened the Raj. In a speech in Parliament, Lord Birkenhead warned India of Britain's “hard fibre”. Even Secretary of State Edwin Montagu, to some Indian eyes a sympathiser of Swaraj, declared that “if the existence of our empire were challenged,...then India would not challenge with success the most determined people in the world”.¹⁷⁶ Though he had called off the struggle, the Mahatma replied, in *Young India*, that India was “prepared for all the ‘hard fibre’ that can be transported across the seas”, that India's demand indeed “involved the existence of the Empire” and that India's spirit would “neither bend nor break” before “the most determined people in the world”. In his reply Gandhi spoke, too, of empires “intoxicated with the red wine of power”.¹⁷⁷

The limit had been crossed. What is more, the Raj could clearly see that arresting Gandhi would invite no rebellion now, for many Muslims felt that by halting the battle Gandhi had betrayed Khilafat, and Hindus too were demoralised. On the night of March 10, after he had written several letters and an article on the likelihood of his arrest, the Mahatma was picked up from his Ashram by Superintendent of Police Dan Healey. As printer and publisher of *Young India*, Shankerlal Banker was also arrested. Eight days later the famous trial took place. The scenes are well-known: Justice Robert S. Broomfield, symbol of Empire, solemn and dutiful but also respectful towards the accused and moved by the occasion; Gandhi asking for the highest penalty and admitting that he had preached disaffection; the six-year sentence pronounced by Broomfield in a trembling voice.

Vallabhbhai had seen hundreds of trials. Even the idea of an accused proudly admitting his offence and claiming his right to repeat it was not new to him: many a satyagrahi had implemented it. But seeing Gandhi in the dock and hearing him request “the severest penalty” and the judge utter “six years” must have choked the strong Patidar. Rigorously silent about his feelings, Patel did not make an exception on this occasion. Immediately after the sentence on Gandhi, he wrote stirring articles in *Navajivan*, but they contain no reference to his personal reaction. However, his daughter Mani, who had attended the trial along with her father, recalled the occasion a year later. She spoke of Gandhi’s “peaceful, sombre and sweet face” when he was sentenced, of the complete silence prevailing in and around the courtroom – “it was as if the birds and animals too were still, and people had stopped breathing” – and of the sadness that ensued. “When asked why they were looking sad, people broke down and wept.”¹⁷⁸

THREE
1922-29
SARDAR



IN his mind Vallabhbhai accused the British of unchivalrous conduct. "When two Rajputs decide to battle, and one of them refuses to strike, the other would refrain from attacking. But here our opponent was not a Rajput, and he attacked by arresting Gandhiji."¹ Vallabhbhai imagined, too, that the Raj's prisons would be unable to hold Gandhi for long. Not knowing that the title was destined for himself, he described the Mahatma as India's "Sardar",² and added:

*Many sacrifices have been offered up by India to the British Lion, but never before had it been its good fortune to receive so sacred a prey. It will not, however, be very easy for it to digest such a prey...The great spiritual strength of our Mahatma will transform the raging lion into a mild lamb.*³

But the fruitless blame and the rootless fancy were passing thoughts. Patel emerged from the shock and loneliness following Gandhi's arrest with a resolve to take charge of Gujarat. His decision, and the realism and self-confidence that marked it, are evident in an article he wrote in *Navajivan*. Though Vallabhbhai writes in the third person, it is plain that he sees himself as "the mason" who, while "fully conscious" of his "shortcomings", will implement the incomplete plans of the incarcerated Mahatma:

Now that Gandhiji has gone, what ought his colleagues and disciples to do? There is no one among them of such outstanding character and ability as could adequately step into his shoes.... His followers are indeed weak and have many shortcomings. His colleagues have neither his sweetness of manner nor that complete self-control....Fortunately, they are fully conscious of their numerous defects.

*But a mason does not claim to have the ability of the planning architect. Yet he experiences no difficulty in completing a structure in accordance with the plan of the architect.*⁴

The first task he gave himself was to raise a million rupees for Gujarat Vidyapith, which lacked a building of its own. He said he would collect the sum by October 2; “precisely, on October 2, the figure of a million was reached”.⁵ He next set into motion a campaign against imported cloth. All over Gujarat, in towns and in the villages, shops that sold foreign cloth were picketed by streams of volunteers, men and women; and merchants in Ahmedabad, Surat, Nadiad and Broach (Bharuch) pledged that they would not purchase fresh stocks of imported cloth. Some of these promises were confined to a period of twelve, nine or even six months, but the practical Vallabhbhai, rebuking those who sneered at the merchants’ “short-term pledges”, earned the traders’ goodwill:

The epithets we have been using when referring to [the merchants] – “scoundrels, dishonest fellows, thieves” – could more appropriately be applied to us rather than to them.... All we had to do was to set fire to our foreign clothes worth a hundred or two hundred rupees. We had at the most to withdraw from government schools one or two of our boys. We were asked to contribute some money for the national schools.

*But did we do any of these things? For the merchants, on the other hand, it is a question of giving up their sole or main source of livelihood....If in the intervening period we all change over to Indian cloth, why would they want to import any more foreign cloth?*⁶

He made a deliberate effort to win the untouchables. In November 1922 the Kathiawad Political Conference asked, in Patel’s presence, for the abolition of untouchability, but more significant than the formal demand was a gesture Vallabhbhai made during the session. Untouchables were present at the meeting – seated in a block specially set aside for them. Patel saw that a volunteer had herded them into their block and enjoined them not to touch the other visitors, and that the untouchables “were complying with these instructions without hesitation”. His response was to get up, step across to the untouchables’ block and sit there. He was followed into the untouchables’ enclosure by the Patidar landowner Darbar Gopaldas, chief of the Chhagam village of Vaso and legatee of two villages in Ahmedabad district and of the small State of Dhasa in Kathiawad. Divested of his estate because of his role in the 1920-21 struggle, Darbar Gopaldas was the President of the Kheda district Congress committee. His wife Bhaktalakshmi, or Bhaktiba, whose father had been the Dewan of the Kathiawad State of Limbdi, accompanied Gopaldas into the untouchables’ block. When Vallabhbhai was called

upon to address the gathering, he stood up and spoke from the untouchables' enclosure, making it "the centre of the conference".

He did not refer to the rude volunteer or to the ruder practice of segregation; that would only have detracted from the stinging eloquence of his cross-over. With this conference Vallabhbhai ceases being merely the leader of the Patidars and becomes the leader of all of Gujarat. He had no doubt been the GPCC chief from January 1921; and he had agreed with the Mahatma, despite an undercurrent of opposition from many Patidars, that no national school or college could exclude any untouchable. Yet Patel's November 1922 "cross-over" had a special, unmistakable and inaugural ring, and the fact that the Mahatma was far away in a prison in Poona gave to his spontaneous gesture the quality of a call, not an echo. He had publicly taken a personal stand, and one of Kheda's most distinguished Patidar couples had joined him.⁷

Vallabhbhai also took a clear stand on two other controversial issues. He declared that civil disobedience could not be given up. True, the Mahatma had not only called it off, he had warned Congressmen against courting arrest prematurely, but Patel hoped to be able to revive it. Gujarat was ready, he claimed in July 1922, to use the satyagraha weapon.⁸ And he set his face against an attempt to change Congress's policy on the boycott of the Raj's councils.

Change was being advocated by powerful voices. Motilal Nehru, released in June 1922, and Congress President Chitta Ranjan Das, who came out of prison in August, said that the councils could be used against the Raj, a view to which Vithalbhai gave enthusiastic support. These gifted debaters wanted to thunder in the councils. 'The spinning wheel and an attack on untouchability did not excite them. "Wreck the councils from within" became their slogan. When Vithalbhai argued that entering councils was like "smuggling into the enemy fort with a view to conquering it", Vallabhbhai replied that "Patelsaheb" needed to know that "the fortress of the enemy is not located in the legislatures".⁹ Governors and the Viceroy, Vallabhbhai pointed out, could rule by ordinances whatever the councils said or did.

Vithalbhai was neither converted nor pleased, but the brothers entered into a fresh pact. "It was arranged," writes Vithalbhai's biographer, "that Vithalbhai should not go to Ahmedabad and Vallabhbhai should not come to Bombay, for their propaganda. And in fact they solemnly kept this pact till Vithalbhai's death." Vithalbhai – "the votary of obstruction from within the councils" – and his younger brother, who felt that the Raj would "continue to function even for a hundred years" if thundering in the councils was the main weapon against it, agreed not to clash before the public of Gujarat or Bombay.¹⁰ Gordhanbhai I. Patel, Vithalbhai's biographer and close associate, who calls his subject "O Captain! My Captain!" and is

sharply critical of the Gandhi-Vallabhbhai partnership, has the following to say of the relationship between the brothers:

The present writer can truthfully say that he has known of no occasion whatever when Vallabhbhai showed any disrespect to Vithalbhai....On the other hand, Vithalbhai was known to have poked fun at the cost of Vallabhbhai, ever and anon, to have called him Suba of Gujarat and such other names, to the amusement of the friends that gathered round them. Everyone of their friends has noticed that Vallabhbhai refused to be provoked by the most provoking remarks of his brother against him.¹¹

But a clash could not be avoided when Congress met in Gaya in December 1922 for its annual session. President Das, Motilal Nehru and Vithalbhai led the attack for the "pro-changers", as they came to be called. The "no-changers" were defended by Vallabhbhai and Rajendra Prasad and by Rajagopalachari, who had been released in April. Formal meetings were followed each night by talks in the different tents. At these informal get-togethers Vallabhbhai was merciless towards the pro-changers, not sparing even Vithalbhai. Addressing a Congress plenary for the first time, Vallabhbhai freely sprinkled Gujarati phrases into his Hindi talk but his message got across. Pointing out that constructive work prepared workers and the masses for a fight, he added:

The legislative chambers are not our battlefield....I oppose council entry. It will do us positive harm.... If we had carried on constructive work with greater vigour, the country by now would have been ready for civil disobedience.¹²

Vallabhbhai supplied firmness to Gaya's no-changers but their star in debate was Rajaji, who successfully countered every point made by Das, Nehru and Vithalbhai. Council entry was defeated by 1,740 votes to 890, and Vallabhbhai, C.R. and Rajendra Prasad were elected to the Working Committee. Das's response was to resign his presidentship and form a new group, the Swarajists. It would remain in Congress, he said, and aim to capture the councils, elections for which were due the end of 1923. Expelling Das and his allies from Congress was not a thought that Vallabhbhai, Rajaji and Rajendra Prasad were prepared to entertain. They chose instead – in the language of *Young India*, of which C.R. had become the editor – "to accept the revolt as a fact and make terms with the rebels".¹³

At the end of February 1923 they proposed a truce to which Das and Nehru agreed. It ruled out all propaganda for or against councils until April 30. That funds and volunteers for disobedience would

be raised in two months was the no-changer hope. That would silence the pro-changers. In fact, however, despite Vallabhbhai's exertions, which included visits to Calcutta, Rangoon and the coalfields of Bihar to raise funds, only Rs 1 1/2 million could be collected, as against the goal of Rs 2 1/2 million, and only 8,000 volunteers - were registered, when the target was 50,000. Vallabhbhai had wanted Gujarat to provide 3,000 volunteers; in one speech he said that the Patidar community alone could raise that many. In the end, only 853 volunteered in Gujarat, of which Kheda's contribution was 178.¹⁴ The demoralisation caused by the Chauri Chaura stoppage was greater than Vallabhbhai had realized. Admitting his failure, Vallabhbhai announced on April 22 that immediate civil disobedience was off.

The announcement did not please everyone in Gujarat. For inciting disobedience through articles in *Navajivan*, Kaka Kalelkar, one of the Mahatma's Ashram colleagues, had been sentenced to a year; Indulal Yagnik had received a similar sentence for a speech; and Gujarat's activists itched to offer a reply. Mahadev Desai proposed individual civil disobedience, but Patel turned it down. Not wanting constructive workers to exchange their posts for places in prison, he forbade satyagraha without his permission.

Vallabhbhai's spirits received a fillip from an unexpected if fleeting contact with the Mahatma on April 16. Finding himself in Poona for a Working Committee (WorCom) meeting, Patel had accompanied Gandhi's son Devadas to Yeravda jail, where Devadas availed himself of an interview with his father that the Raj's rules provided for. Vallabhbhai waited outside. When the interview was over the Mahatma came to the door with his son. On seeing Patel, Gandhi broke into a wide smile and exclaimed, "What a gift I have had today!"¹⁵ Then the door closed on the Mahatma. Vallabhbhai had not managed to say a word to Gandhi but he wrote of his delight to his daughter.

May saw a setback. An AICC meeting in Bombay voted, by a small majority, in favour of a pro-changer resolution disallowing propaganda against councils. To Patel this was an unwarranted extension of the February truce, and an illegitimate repudiation of the plenary decision reached in Gaya. Along with C.R., Rajendra Prasad and three others, he resigned from the WorCom.

The Bombay resolution had been proposed by Purshottamdas Tandon of the U.P., seconded by Jawaharlal Nehru and backed by Abul Kalam Azad. Released earlier in the year, Jawaharlal and Azad had claimed that unity was their aim but Vallabhbhai could not agree that the Bombay resolution was a step towards it. In a letter he asked Jawaharlal "why you would not allow those who are in the right to have their own way and prefer to allow those who are in the wrong

to do so".¹⁶ Rejecting the Bombay resolution as unconstitutional, Vallabhbhai and C.R. continued to ridicule the councils, while Das, Motilal and Vithalbhai toured India asking voters to choose Swarajist candidates in the elections due in November.

Congress was speaking in two voices. Meeting in Nagpur in July, the AICC faced the discord but could not remove it. Jawaharlal proposed disciplinary action against the Gujarat and Tamilnad committees, i.e., against Vallabhbhai and C.R. The latter reminded the AICC of Gaya. When Jawaharlal's motion for censure was defeated by two votes, he resigned from the Working Committee. The Vallabhbhai-Jawaharlal relationship thus began on the stormy note that would erupt again and again in the long years that lay ahead.

* * *

Nagpur thrust a satyagraha on Vallabhbhai's shoulders. Its origins lay in a visit that C.R., Rajendra Prasad and Devadas Gandhi had made in March 1923 to Jabalpur (spelt Jubbulpore at the time) in what then was the Central Provinces (C.P.). The municipal committee voted to fly the national flag over the town hall as a gesture of welcome, but the district magistrate vetoed the plan and announced a ban on flying the flag on the town hall. Jabalpur's citizens resolved to disregard the ban and C.R. wrote in *Young India* that Congress had stumbled on "a clean and beautiful battlefield".¹⁷

Peacefully ascending the well-guarded town hall was, however, a problem. A month later, on April 13, the C.P. Government offered a simpler opportunity for disobedience: in Nagpur, the C.P. capital, it prevented a peaceful procession with the flag from entering the town's Civil Lines. When the volunteers carrying the flag attempted to go forward, they were beaten, dragged, picked up and flung into the open drains by the C.P. police. Led by Jamnalal Bajaj, the Mahatma's friend and backer, the Nagpur district Congress Committee decided to violate the restrictions. Beginning with the first of May, volunteers walked with the flag on every working day towards Civil Lines. All successive groups were arrested. Day after day, right through May, June and July and until the middle of August, flag-carrying volunteers sought arrest. They were herded into Nagpur jail and, when that overflowed, into Akola jail.

To Vallabhbhai this struggle seemed more like what he had been looking for, and more worthwhile than the individual disobedience that Mahadev had been urging. From June he started sending Gujarat's activists in batches to Nagpur. They were joined by groups from the Tamil country sent by C.R. and by a contingent from Karnataka. Soon volunteers streamed in from all over. They were arrested on a variety of grounds: some for taking the flag

to Civil Lines, where it was prohibited; others for violating a ban on processions, a procession being eventually defined as "two men walking together, or one following the other, provided at least one had a flag in hand"; and a majority under section 109 of the Criminal Procedure Code, which empowered the police to arrest vagrants of undesirable character and no means of livelihood.

Among those arrested as vagrants under section 109 were lawyers, double graduates, lecturers, zamindars and businessmen – and individuals like Vinoba Bhave, the Mahatma's disciple and future founder of Bhoodan or the land-gift movement, and Ravishankar Maharaj of Mehmedabad taluka in Kheda, Gandhi's follower from 1915, whom the Baraiyas and Patanvadiyas of Kheda had accepted as a guide and reformer. Vinoba, confined in Akola, had to spend several hours a day crushing stones under the hot sun. Ravishankar, in Nagpur, was ordered to grind 25 kilos of grain on the chakki each day. Prisoners not fulfilling daily work quotas were put in fetters or solitary cells. The dal in the prisoners' food had more dirt than pulse grains, the chapatis invariably had pebbles. Warders threatened the prisoners and hustled them through doorless latrines. Not surprisingly, some 200 of the 1,750 volunteers who courted arrest in the Nagpur flag satyagraha, most of them unused to prison hardships, took the option of apologizing and getting out.

Behind the harshness of the Raj's response lay an individual and his psychology. Charles A. Clarke, Commissioner of Nagpur, lived in Civil Lines. A believer in teaching "law-breakers" a lesson,¹⁸ he had decided, out of dislike or fear or both, that the flag would not be carried past his house. If, he declared, flag-carriers did manage to march in front of his bungalow, he would shoot at them. Apart from being Commissioner, Clarke was secretary of the powerful ICS officers' association and the C.P. correspondent of the influential British-owned organs, the *Times of India* and the *Statesman*, in short a man feared by his superiors. In the *Times of India* he wrote that the satyagraha aimed "to harass the Europeans" living in Civil Lines. The charge was false. When they were first stopped and assaulted on April 13, the flag-carriers merely wanted to go through Civil Lines into Sadar Bazar, where they intended to hold a meeting. Later on their aim was to establish the right to carry the flag on a public street, not to humiliate Europeans who might be living along the way.

Bajaj was arrested at the end of June. His trial was completed on the day, early in July, on which the AICC met in Nagpur, but the magistrate had reserved his order. Believing that Bajaj would receive a light sentence if the AICC backed the flag struggle with one voice, the no-changers at the meeting proposed "every

assistance' for the satyagraha. The Swarajists, however, opposed the resolution. Next day Bajaj was given 18 months rigorous and a Rs 3,000 fine*, and no-changer bitterness soared.

But Bajaj's arrest had galvanized Congress's WorCom, which now asked Vallabhbhai to assume charge of the Nagpur struggle. This he did from July 10, and the tempo rose. He enjoyed himself. "It's a beautiful fight," he wrote Mahadev.¹⁹ He asked for 50 candidates for prison a day, got almost as many and wondered when he would be arrested himself. Clarifying that Europeans were not the target, he enlisted the help of his brother Vithalbhai, who enjoyed a social relationship with the C.P. Governor, Sir Frank Sly, and with the Home Member of Sly's executive council, Sir Moropant Joshi. Vithalbhai turned up in Nagpur and had several private sessions with Joshi and Sly, and Joshi arranged a meeting between Sly and the two Patel brothers together.

The struggle-and-negotiation mix was successful. The oral agreement, to which Sly, the Patel brothers and Joshi were all party, was as follows. The Raj would allow the flag to be carried through Civil Lines at noon on August 18. In the evening Vallabhbhai would announce that the battle was over. All prisoners would then be released. Careful as always, Vallabhbhai obtained Joshi's written confirmation of the clause regarding the release. A hundred volunteers marched through Civil Lines on the appointed day. From time to time they raised nationalist slogans; while passing a church or houses where Europeans lived, they observed silence. After reaching Sadar Bazar they dispersed. In the evening Vallabhbhai spoke:

*The honour of the national flag stands vindicated and our right to take out processions on public roads in a peaceful and orderly manner has been restored. This I regard as a triumph of truth, non-violence and suffering. By the grace of God, I am able to announce that the Nagpur satyagraha campaign closes successfully.*²⁰

But the releases did not take place on time, thanks in part to Vithalbhai. A tactless statement by him in Bombay that "the people had won" and that "the prisoners would be released"²¹ – an announcement that Vallabhbhai had deliberately refrained from making – had infuriated Clarke, at whose instigation all the civilian officers of the C.P. stood up against their Governor and Home Member and opposed the release. In a private letter to Mahadev Desai,

* He refused to pay the fine. To realize the sum his car was attached but not a man in Nagpur would buy it; it was sold, eventually, in Kathiawad.

Vallabhbhai said: "Vithalbhai has been indiscreet. What he has said has caused a terrific commotion in the Civil Lines."²²

While ready, privately, to admit his brother's slip, Vallabhbhai was not prepared to let the Government wriggle out of its commitment. On September 1 he gave it formal warning that he would publish everything and resume satyagraha if prisoners were not released within 24 hours. The warning sparked a brief yet fierce clash within the Raj in which Sly and Joshi opposed the Commissioner. The question went up by cipher to Reading the Viceroy and Peel the Secretary of State, who reluctantly ruled, before Vallabhbhai's deadline was over, in favour of release. On September 3 the prisoners, including Bajaj, Vinoba and Ravishankar, were out.

The Raj had not been trounced by the flag. Vallabhbhai himself spoke not of "victory" but of "vindication" and of "an honourable conclusion". Yet Reading said in a confidential letter to Peel, "The fact that the Congress representatives were admitted to parley, and that terms were concluded with them, has been advanced as evidence that persistent pressure on Government is not devoid of results."²³ Vallabhbhai had reason, therefore, to feel heartened by the outcome of the first struggle in which he had to play a commander's role. He was encouraged, too, by the spirit of the released satyagrahis, who said to him:

*The hardships we experienced in jail have not in the least diminished our keenness. They have in fact increased it. Please, therefore, find other tasks for us.*²⁴

* * *

The Patel brothers' teamwork at Nagpur had reduced but by no means removed no-changer resentment at the Swarajist revolt. If the resentment continued until November, when council elections were due, Swarajist candidates would suffer. To deal with the difficulty, Congress met in a special session in September. The venue was Delhi, the president Abul Kalam Azad, only 35 at the time. Barring one key figure, all influential Congressmen had declared where they stood. The exception was Muhammad Ali, the acknowledged leader, at the time, of Muslim India, who was released just before the Delhi session. Some non-changer hearts nursed the hope that an Ali-C.R.-Vallabhbhai combination would inspire the session to repudiate the Swarajists. Two blows shattered the hope. The first was supplied by Rajaji, who felt exhausted and said he would not go to Delhi. "The general," he added, "should be Maulana Muhammad Ali."²⁵

Yet it was Muhammad Ali, Congress's most vocal and biting critic of the Raj's councils, who supplied the next blow, proposing at the Delhi session that Congress should permit council-entry to those desiring it. Vallabhbhai, Bajaj, Rajendra Prasad and their friends were bitterly disappointed. They could not forget the thrill and glory – as it had seemed to them – of council-boycott and non-cooperation, which to them spelt immediate de facto Swaraj; and they remembered, too, the Swarajist arrows they had received: the wound over Bajaj's sentence was only two months old. Reluctant, however, to alienate Muhammad Ali and unwilling to break Congress into two, they agreed to yield. Rajendra Prasad and Vallabhbhai were their spokesmen in the open session. Speaking first, Prasad said:

*I am convinced that we are deviating from the principle of non-cooperation by going to the legislature....My shoulders are not big enough, however, to take the responsibility of creating a split in the Congress.*²⁶

Just as Vallabhbhai rose to speak, he was shown a telegram from Rajaji. Mahadev and Devadas had wired Muhammad Ali's views to C.R. and asked for his advice. Narhari Parikh saw that on reading Rajaji's wire, Vallabhbhai "appeared greatly relieved". "As he stood up," Parikh has recalled, "one could see that his eyes were moist and the fingers holding the telegram were shaking."²⁷ Having to concede victory to his foes broke the proud warrior's heart. "In a voice full of sadness", he said in Hindi:

We carried on this fight until now to the limit of our strength and ability and kept the flag of non-cooperation flying. We are, however, all soldiers. There is no leader among us but there is one person among us who has an acute brain and who thinks clearly. The message he has sent from his sick-bed has just arrived. He says: "I advise you to place the entire responsibility on Maulana Muhammad Ali....If he is very keen upon a settlement, well, accept it....There is no point in our preventing people from doing what they want." I accept this advice.

Today, we look upon each other with suspicion and without love. This is an attempt to re-establish affection.

*It was a painful task during this period to oppose great leaders of this country. It is equally difficult today to give up that opposition. Nevertheless, I request all those who are in favour of no change that they should willingly accept our present position. I place the entire responsibility on Maulana Muhammad Ali.*²⁸

Vallabhbhai did not have the heart to be present for the voting in which Congress would go back on council-boycott. As soon as his short speech was over, he walked out. Most no-changers accepted his advice and a resolution permitting Congressmen to vote or stand in the November elections (but not urging them to do so) was comfortably passed. Returning to Gujarat, Vallabhbhai ordered Congressmen there to stay out of the elections. Mavlankar had become a Swarajist, and two of Vallabhbhai's allies in Nadiad, Gokaldas Talati and Fulchand Bapuji Shah, sponsored a candidate for the Bombay council, but the great majority of Gujarat's Congressmen abided by Vallabhbhai's wishes. The Congress Swarajists gained a majority in the C.P. council and emerged as the largest single party in the Bengal council. Elsewhere they did not perform too well. However, Vithalbhai was elected to the Central Legislative Assembly from one of the Bombay city seats, defeating his Liberal and independent rivals.

* * *

Within days the fates cured Vallabhbhai of his Delhi dejection. He was presented with a task that his drooping spirits needed and the result was a classic and victorious satyagraha. It arose out of an announcement by the Raj at the end of September of a levy of Rs 2¹/₂ lakhs on the residents of Borsad taluka. Every person over 16 was to pay two rupees and seven annas towards the sum. The Raj claimed the money as its expense on special anti-dacoity police posted in the taluka and in a few adjoining places in Anand taluka, including Karamsad, Vallabhbhai's village, and Gana, where he had married Jhaverba.

Mounting and fearful crime was a fact in the area. Scores of murders, dacoities and kidnappings had been carried out since 1919 by a gang led by Babar Deva, a Patanvadiya of Golel village in Borsad taluka, who based himself in a village north of Golel called Jogan. Most members of his gang were Patanvadiyas from Jogan, and virtually all his crimes were committed within a day's walk from Jogan. His peer in crime was Alimiya Sadakmiya, or Aliya as everyone called him, a Muslim peasant from Borsad town. Aliya was supposed to have committed "about 35 murders and 55 dacoities in the Borsad area between 1918 and 1923"²⁹ Smaller dacoits were also on the prowl, some of them frightening their victims by pretending to be Babar Deva or Aliya. Most were Baraiyas or Patanvadiyas.

Some Baraiyas and Patanvadiyas had owned and ruled substantial acreages at one time, but over the decades their lands had been sold to Patidars or forfeited to Vaniyas and Brahmins whose loans the Baraiyas and Patanvadiyas could not repay. Derogatorily called

“Koli” or “Dharala” by the other communities, they were listed by the Raj under “criminal tribes” and required, if adults, to present themselves every day at a police station. This *hazri*, as the requirement was termed, was a stigma the Baraiyas and Patanvadiyas wanted to shake off; and they desired to be accepted as Thakores (Kshatriyas). Any offence in their neighbourhood was often reason enough for Baraiyas and Patanvadiyas to be detained as dangerous vagrants under section 109. Unable to offer sureties, they were sent to prison where they acquired habits to justify the label society had given them. Owning little or no land, stigmatized and criminalized, several Baraiyas and Patanvadiyas were drawn into dacoity, a process helped by their inability to resist liquor or check a fiery temper. No one was spared when they were aroused: Babar Deva’s wife and sister were among those he had murdered.

The Raj’s justification for the September 1923 levy was the alleged withholding by residents of information about the dacoits. Having thus assisted crime, they deserved to pay the levy. Everyone knew, however, that the dacoits were in league with the police, not with the residents. Valiant villagers who had resisted the dacoits or informed the police about them had had their noses cut off or their bodies nailed to a tree; it was obvious that their names had been given to the dacoits by the police. All shops in Borsad town closed in protest when the levy was announced; the municipal president, Bhogilal Choksi, resigned; and the people of at least one village, Ras, asked the Government to withdraw the police rather than levy the tax; they would, they said, fight the dacoits on their own.

Vallabhbhai learned of the tax and the furore against it when he returned from Delhi. At once he sensed the making of an ideal struggle, a fight on home turf as far as he was concerned. “I run to the help of Borsad,” he would say, “because I have eaten its salt.”³⁰ But also because he knew Borsad and the world of Borsad crime. He had defended Baraiyas accused of murder and known of the nexus between policemen and criminals. His first step was to ask Ravishankar Maharaj and Mohanlal Pandya, who had both just emerged from the Nagpur struggle, to tour the villages and get at the facts. Their checking and cross-checking reinforced the view that the police had an unholy alliance with several dacoits, and in particular with Aliya.

However, Vallabhbhai was looking for evidence, not just for certainty. He asked Darbar Gopaldas, the district Congress chief, to see if he could get at something solid. Gopaldas went to Borsad town and spoke to Choksi, who had resigned as municipal president; Choksi turned to Vallabhbhai’s brother Kashibhai, who had taken over

Vallabhbhai's practice in 1910, when Vallabhbhai left Borsad for London in pursuit of a barristership.

Kashibhai went to the Mamlatdar's office and, by a stroke of fortune, was shown official correspondence that confirmed the worst suspicions of the people of Borsad. The clerk who showed Kashibhai the documents and allowed him to copy them was a Congress sympathizer who was later dismissed, but he had put Vallabhbhai in possession of two vital pieces of evidence. One revealed that the Collector of Kheda, a Sindhi called Hiranand Kripalani, had opposed the tax in discussions with other Raj officials. The other item of evidence, even more damaging to the Raj's prestige, proved that the police had colluded with Aliya and armed him in the hope, illusory as it turned out to be, that Aliya would help trap Babar Deva.

Thus equipped, Patel decided to attack. The GPCC met in Borsad on December 1 and declared that the residents should not pay the tax. That day Vallabhbhai told a meeting of the town's citizens that "it was not a question of two or three rupees". His scorn, kept under a lid for a while, could now be let loose:

*We are not beggars that we cannot afford to throw away two or three rupees. But the government wants to take that much money after calling us associates of dacoits. If the Government admits that its authority has vanished and its finances are poor, we shall be quite prepared to take over the administration.*³¹

About six thousand residents of the taluka, most of them peasants, assembled in Borsad the next day to make their decision. Before this gathering Patel unveiled some of the evidence in his hands. He spoke of the Collector's disagreement with the levy – "his letter is in my possession" – and then referred to the police's league with Aliya:

I am sure about my facts...There is an outlaw abroad called Ali. When Babar could not be got hold of, the police made friends with this new genius, sought to get rid of an outlaw with the help of an outlaw, and provided him with arms and ammunition. O the pity and the shame of it!

He dealt in his talk with the Raj's justification for the levy:

The reason assigned... is that the people do not provide information or evidence. Let us see how far this is true. Babar has to his credit 22 murders. Not one of the victims was a rich man. He did not murder them for the mere fun of it. They were informants. If after 22 such informants were murdered the Government seriously

argues that the people do not give information, shall we ask how many policemen were murdered?

Exhorting Baraiyas and Patanvadiyas "to give up drink", he also urged "all such present here as have ever helped dacoits in any way" to forsake "that nefarious business, a hateful thing". And he probed his audience's willingness to fight:

Let us plainly tell the Government that we are honourable men of character, we shall not sign certificates of our bad character with our own hands. We refuse to pay the fine....Fight the fight then like Mahatmaji's men – his men do not need a stick or a dharia, they need brave backs to receive blows. Do not be tempted into anger, do not be tempted into violence....Now I ask you, if you are prepared to fight, raise your hands.³²

All the hands went up, and the Borsad satyagraha began. Vallabhbhai organized it with superb efficiency. A headquarters was set up in Borsad town, run by Darbar Gopaldas. Mohanlal Pandya prepared releases for the Press and bulletins for the villages. Because of the work he had done among the Baraiyas of villages near Ras, Ravishankar Maharaj was asked to guide those villages. Other areas were placed in the care of experienced men like Phulchand Shah of Nadiad (whose role in the November elections was forgiven) and Raojibhai Patel of Sojitra. Patidar gols agreed to fine community members who submitted to the tax. The taluka's Baraiyas and Patanvadiyas joined the satyagraha as wholeheartedly as the Patidars. The tax and the slur of collusion had been slapped on them too.

The Raj empowered officials to attach property or cattle in lieu of the tax, but a volunteer perched on a tree at the entrance of a village would beat a drum if he saw officials arriving. On hearing the drum the men would lock up their houses and take their cattle outside the village for grazing. Locked in, their womenfolk and valuables were beyond the reach of the officials. "The market opened at night, and women used to go out only after dark to fetch water."³³ The bid to attach property collapsed before a blend of ingenuity and solidarity. In Sunav, for instance, the village chaprasi asked to bring utensils out of an unlocked house refused to do so. The mukhi, or headman, was asked to perform the chore; he, too, refused. The attaching official then tried to hire labour but no one in Sunav would offer it. The official left Sunav with nothing in his hands.

"Your land will be attached," said the Mamlatdar to the peasants. They weren't shaken. There was a war of words too. The Raj's director of information complained of "confidential papers obtained

improperly and illegally from Government officers". "Let the Government prosecute me," replied Vallabhbhai, knowing that it couldn't.³⁴ The district Superintendent of Police gave, in 77 paragraphs, his version of the taluka's history of crime. Vallabhbhai used the DSP's account to demolish the Raj's justification for the levy. Remarks by the DSP referring to the murder of informers proved the populace's efforts to help. Vallabhbhai reproduced them without comment:

Para 6, DSP's Report: *"The unfortunate man who was crucified to a tree and riddled with bullets was an informer."* Para 7: *"The murder in the case was the outcome of assistance rendered to the Police by the deceased man's family."* Para 9: *"A Mohammedan who had given evidence against dacoits was attacked and left with his nose severed."*

To other sentences he added a parenthetical, unanswerable and clinching comment:

Para 29: *"Four villages in Borsad taluka were raided by dacoits armed with deadly weapons but the raiders decamped."* (Surely not out of goodwill, but because they saw that discretion was the better part of valour.) Para 32: *"The people having collected, two shots were fired by the dacoits."* (Did the people collect there to witness a tamasha?) Para 58: *"A potter was cruelly stabbed in his chest."* (Surely not because he was rich, but because either he was an informer or because he dared to offer resistance.)³⁵

An early achievement of Vallabhbhai's campaign was the arrest of Aliya. Their duplicity exposed, the police were compelled to net him. Long aware of Aliya's practice of visiting the Patidar mukhi of Uttarsanda village, a man who helped Aliya and received some of his loot, the police waited for Aliya in the mukhi's house and caught him there. At the end of December Collector Kripalani asked his officials to stop demanding the tax and Bombay to withdraw it. Acceptance of his request was eased by a change in Bombay's Governorship. Sir Leslie Wilson had replaced Sir George Lloyd on December 10. Troubled by Vallabhbhai's revelations and by the inability of his officials to refute them, Wilson also wanted "to get his regime off to a good start".³⁶

At his instance, the Bombay Government's Home Member, Sir Maurice Hayward, arrived in Borsad early in January. To him Kripalani repeated his request. Commissioner Pratt, now in the final weeks of his Indian career, backed Kripalani; earlier he had favoured the tax. A hundred and fifty residents of the taluka were invited to

meet Hayward. They chose a Borsad pleader, Rambhai, as their spokesman. Vallabhbhai stayed away from the meeting, as did Darbar Gopaldas, Mohanlal Pandya and Ravishankar Maharaj, but Rambhai's presentation sufficed.

Pratt translated Rambhai's Gujarati into English for Hayward's benefit while 149 residents and several district officials sat and listened. Rambhai's facts were not really contestable, and the officials did not know where to look when Rambhai pointed to a police inspector called Maganlal and described him to Hayward as "a personal friend both of the outlaw Aliya and of the mukhi of Uttarsanda". Next day, some district officials more loyal than Pratt and Kripalani ushered in a few Borsad residents to give Hayward "the other side". Hayward had a question for each: "Were you present yesterday?" Those answering "yes" were asked to withdraw.³⁷

Two days after Hayward's return to Bombay, the Government announced the withdrawal of the tax. Vallabhbhai was as uninhibited in appreciating the reversal as he had been in attacking the levy. Overruling Gopaldas and Pandya, he stopped publication of a leaflet that would make "the opponent feel the bitterness of defeat".³⁸ In a statement he said:

*A Government always considers it risky to appear to be yielding to its people even when it is a case of rectifying an injustice. This is the first occasion when the Government has admitted its mistake publicly and yielded to a satyagraha....The Government has thus gained a victory...We would be failing in our duty if we did not congratulate most sincerely His Excellency the Governor of Bombay, Sir Leslie Wilson, for showing so much moral courage.*³⁹

Aliya was hanged in early 1924. Babar Deva was caught in March 1924 by the skilful and daring Police Commissioner of Borsad State, B. A. Ghatge, and hanged in late 1924. Two other developments followed the Borsad satyagraha. Firstly, Borsad town replaced Nadiad as Kheda district's principal Congress centre. Darbar Gopaldas and some ten others decided to base themselves in Borsad and prepare the taluka for the independence struggle. Secondly, a group led by Ravishankar and Pandya immersed themselves in serving Baraiyas, Patanvadiyas and untouchables.

A year earlier Vallabhbhai had demonstrated an identification with untouchables. Now his expanding world, or widening constituency, would accommodate the Baraiyas and Patanvadiyas as well. Declaring that he would fight for their reclassification as Kshatriyas in the next census, Vallabhbhai also asked for volunteers to assist Ravishankar in his effort. Thirty-five young men responded. The

attempt produced tangible results over the next three years. Ravishankar told the Baraiyas and Patanvadiyas that they would have to give up crime if they wanted hazri abolished; and he told the Raj that if hazri was removed in a village, he would guarantee that its poor peasants did not steal. If they committed theft, he would fast until the stolen property was surrendered to the police. Despite initial unwillingness, the authorities gradually removed hazri in village after village. Dressed in a vest and short dhoti of khadi, walking bare-footed from village to village, sleeping in the huts of Baraiyas and Patanvadiyas and weaning them from crime and liquor, Ravishankar became a revered figure for the Baraiyas and Patanvadiyas.

"I know how to fight," Vallabhbhai told Mahadev some time after the Nagpur and Borsad battles. "If a hitch were to arise during a struggle, I would somehow know how to overcome it. But I don't enjoy discussions about accords. At times they suffocate me."⁴⁰ Awareness of his limitations was and would always be Patel's strength, but he wasn't inept at conflict-resolution. Kishorlal Mashruwala, then Registrar of Gujarat Vidyapith and a future editor of *Harijan*, the journal that Gandhi started in 1933, noted Vallabhbhai's skill in resolving a 1923 dispute that threatened the stability of Gujarat Vidyapith. Involving Acharya Kripalani, who was a Vidyapith professor at the time and owned a sharp tongue at all times, and Trikamlal Shah, a lecturer at the Vidyapith, the dispute had roused strong feelings. There were demands for resignation and suspension. However, at the executive committee meeting where the matter was to come to a head, Patel addressed both Kripalani and Trikamlal "in such a sweet way, in a low voice and with such a quiet face" that neither Kripalani nor Trikamlal nor anyone else felt it necessary or possible to say anything thereafter.⁴¹

* * *

One of the first things Vallabhbhai did on winning the Borsad fight was to call on his mother at Karamsad. Ladba was about 77 now, and Vallabhbhai, her fourth son, 48. Responding, at the age of 74 or so, to the Mahatma's call, Ladba had switched to khadi and taught herself spinning. Visitors seeing her on one of her rare visits to Vallabhbhai's Ahmedabad home would find Ladba spinning or praying with beads. But she hadn't cast off her domestic concerns. When, therefore, Vallabhbhai turned up at Karamsad in January 1924, Ladba raised the question of Mani. Already several years older than most brides of the time, Mani, who was studying Gujarati literature, English and Bengali at Gujarat Vidyapith, would be fully 20 in April. "What is destined to happen will happen," the son replied. "I think God has kept me alive only to see the day of Mani's

marriage," returned Ladba. Mani's father remained silent. He hadn't asked Mani if she wanted to marry, or looked around for a boy for her, or asked others if they knew of someone suitable.

Shyness between father and daughter and Vallabhbhai's preoccupations had come in the way. Vallabhbhai's apparent unconcern regarding his daughter's marriage may have been linked to the early deaths of young married women around him: not only Jhaverba and Diwaliba but the wives of Somabhai and Kashibhai, too, had died young. The brothers were still in their thirties when their wives died, and none remarried. "We could very well be described as a tribe of widowers," Kashibhai would say in the 1960s.⁴³ Moreover, the Mahatma had taken a paternal interest in Mani and Dahya, who seemed to talk more openly with Gandhi about their future than with their father.

Silence, therefore, was all that Vallabhbhai could offer when Ladba spoke to him about Mani's betrothal. The mother next asked her son what his children were studying. The victor of Borsad, the Vallabhbhai who gave frontal and crushing replies to the Raj, tried to evade the question. When he took leave, Ladba again asked him to do something about Mani's betrothal. Needled, Vallabhbhai complained that he was being pestered. Ladba's unanswerable retort was in the best Vallabhbhai style:

*You are right. A father who does not even know what his children are studying is not going to find a son-in-law.*⁴⁴

In September 1922, Vallabhbhai, who was visiting Bombay at the time, had written to Mani and Dahya (then 18 and 16) that if they "needed anything" they should speak to "Bhai Mavlankar or Pandit (also a neighbour) or to Doctorsaheb (Kanuga)."⁴⁵ His naming three persons who might help suggests that he hadn't spoken, before leaving Ahmedabad, to any one of them. No doubt they were reliable friends, and we may assume that Vallabhbhai's trust in their goodwill to his children was well-founded, but we get the impression of a father who is not only reserved and preoccupied but who often leaves home and his children in a hurry, without making arrangements for their care in his absence. In March 1923, writing to Mani from Calcutta, where he had sought funds for Congress, he said: "If you need money, the office will lend it on my account. You are not to worry. Keep yourselves happy."⁴⁶

The Vallabhbhai of this period is a father who cares but not one who plans or arranges matters in advance. Perhaps he is not able to; often, perhaps, he is abruptly summoned away from his children – to Nagpur or Borsad for a struggle, to Bombay or Calcutta for raising funds. The

nation comes first, the children second. Luckily for Vallabhbhai and for themselves, Mani and Dahya are self-reliant, and before long a daughter who often found herself alone would take charge of father and never leave him unattended.

Mani would accept this role as a calling in 1928, but not before going through tearful and depressive spells. These spells were linked to the question of marriage, to the fear that her father would land himself in prison, leaving her and her brother alone, and to the silence between father and daughter. The second of these factors was to the fore in August 1923, when the Nagpur struggle that Vallabhbhai was conducting had reached a climax and his arrest was being predicted. Writing from Ahmedabad, Mahadev Desai informed him that Manibehn, who had earlier spent some time alongside her father in Nagpur, was tearful at home. In his reply to Mahadev, Vallabhbhai said:

*Devadas (the Mahatma's youngest son) and you should keep visiting my home. You will surely see to it that the youngsters do not feel lonely. I do not understand why Manibehn wept. She has such courage. She had encouraged prison-going for the fight here. How can one cry after doing that?*⁴⁷

But by March 1924, Mani, in Bombay at the time, was lamenting that she could not talk with her father. The complaint was old. It had reached Gandhi and Mahadev in 1921. When Mahadev passed it on, Vallabhbhai had answered:

I am somewhat at fault. But my work keeps me out of the house till late at night. Often I eat my dinners out too, at Dr Kanuga's.

She is unable to talk frankly with me, and feels uncomfortable if I try to talk with her. But it is not her fault. It's a tradition in the family. Until I was thirty I didn't utter a word if elders were around....Older ones hardly spoke with youngsters.

Desai, the go-between, sent this on to Mani and said in a covering letter:

*One can be freer with one's father than with anyone else....You are lucky to have such a remarkably fine father....An innocent child like you should have no hesitation in talking to anybody. Go to your father, talk to him and then write to me.*⁴⁸

But the talk never took place, though the need for it was realized from time to time. Habit and inhibition prevented what father and daughter both longed for. Vallabhbhai found it easier to write things

to Mani than to say them; his lips and voice may never have urged his daughter to say whatever she felt to father, nor assured her that father would understand. But his pen did – in Gujarati now, not English.

To Mani, 31.3.24: *Until now I was moving about without being anxious about you, but your sadness these last three or four months has troubled me. Dahya too has become unhappy. You don't honestly tell me what the matter is. When I ask, you say nothing. If asked again, you start crying and complain against me. What the complaint is I am unable to understand.*

Can I play and joke with you the way I can with children? Obviously I can't. Yet if you and I are not able to talk with each other the fault, as I see it, is more yours than mine. I tried hard. But I grew tired, your complaint against me remained and on top of everything you had the weapon of crying. That has defeated me. I am ready to hear anything you may have to say but not to face your crying....

Try to get well and then we will compare each other's faults and determine the blame of each....

I don't talk more with your brother than with you, but he is able to see a good deal of my love, and he is not the least bit inhibited when he has to tell me anything.

What do I have apart from the happiness of you two?.... After you have recovered we will have a long talk. My desire is that you will freely pour out your mental anxieties before Father. It will give you great peace. Blessings from Father.⁴⁹

In her reply, which is not available, Mani must have spoken of "my fault" and touched on her lack of a mother, for in his next letter Vallabhbhai wrote:

You are not at all to blame. Circumstances so conspired that you couldn't speak freely with me.... Besides, what fault can an innocent child like you have? It's only when you start crying that you make me and others unhappy. Others then think that I am tormenting you or that you are being childish.

That you have borne a great sadness is not hidden from me. But you cannot imagine the sadness of having a step-mother.... God has given us many other joys. You should remember them and thank God, instead of remembering sorrows that have no solution.⁵⁰

Learning that taunts from servants had hurt Mani, Vallabhbhai wrote again.

To Mani, 7.4.24: *It looks as if the taunts of servants have given you a lot of pain. All that should be forgotten. We should keep in mind the pain in being a servant. Anger is not the way to reform servants. They need compassion, though it is also true that many servants abuse the compassion extended to them!*

Such a servant should be asked to leave. But we shouldn't have a debate with him. You will understand this from experience. I had your habit when I was a child. Knocks and experience changed me and you too will change.

Helped by her own reflections, her father's letters or the counsel of friends, or by more than one factor, Mani surmounted her depression, and Vallabhbhai could write to her of his "great delight in learning that your mind is at peace".⁵¹ To continue her physical recuperation Mani went to the seaside village of Hazira near Surat, where more letters of encouragement and advice arrived from her father. In one of them Vallabhbhai took her to task for not having written any letter to Mrs Kanuga: "Poor Nandubehn loves you like a child of her womb, and Doctor too has the same affection for you. Not to send her a single letter can't be called proper."⁵²

* * *

We are in May 1924. By now Vallabhbhai has moved house. The owners of the Bhadra dwelling want it for their use, and Vallabhbhai rents a residence on Khamasa Chowk. In January, just when Patel and his fellow-fighters were celebrating their Borsad victory, Gandhi had been operated for appendicitis in Poona's Sassoon Hospital. Bombay presidency's surgeon-general, Colonel Maddock, skilfully performed the surgery under torchlight – the electricity had failed. Some days after the surgery visitors were allowed to see him in the hospital. Mahadev recorded the reunion:

*He looked very worn out. When he saw us, looking at Vallabhbhai he greeted him: "Hail! O king of Borsad!" And then he burst into a broad laugh and patted Vallabhbhai's back. "That truly was a feat you performed at Borsad," the Mahatma added.*⁵³

Addressing Mahadev, Gandhi said:

*I have heard that you are doing exactly what Vallabhbhai asks you to do. If, at dead of night, he points out a sun to you, you say, "Yes, I see it". And if he shows stars by day you say, "I see them". That is how solid work is done.*⁵⁴

Nine days later, Motilal Nehru, who had been elected leader of the 45-member Swarajist group in the Central Assembly, called on the Mahatma. Nehru referred to his entry into the council he had earlier boycotted: "It was after long days and nights of deliberation that I came to the decision that I for one could serve the country only in this way." "You have yet to convince me that yours is the right course," answered Gandhi. When Nehru raised the possibility of a resolution in the Assembly asking for the Mahatma's release, Gandhi said, "There must be honour, there must be dignity....Our flag must not be lowered."⁵⁵

Within days, however, the Mahatma was a free man, after having served a little less than two years of his six-year sentence. There was a strong feeling within the Raj, shared by its Indian friends, that continuing to confine an ill Gandhi would increase Indians' dislike of Britain. Muslim hostility to the empire had in any case lost its teeth: a Turk and a Muslim, Mustafa Kamal, had emasculated Khilafat and would soon, in March 1924, formally abolish it. As for non-Muslim India, its opposition had been blunted by the Swarajists' entry into the Raj's councils. Though Gandhi continued to disfavour the councils, his words to visitors from his hospital bed had made it plain to every one, including the Raj, that he would not, if freed, ask the Swarajists to leave the councils.⁵⁶ He might even, some officials believed, make the Swarajists in the councils more cooperative and less obstructive.⁵⁷ The Raj was not proved wrong. Gandhi's next assault on the empire would not come for another six years.

The Mahatma's first article after his release and recuperation was about Vallabhbhai's leadership during his incarceration. He paid a tribute to "Vallabhbhai's magnificent organizing and administrative" skill, noted that Patel had "collected around himself a band of devoted workers of like mind and ability" and acknowledged that the Borsad satyagraha led by Vallabhbhai "was in many ways superior" to the struggles of the peasants of Kheda and the millhands of Ahmedabad that he, the Mahatma, had generalised in 1918. He also welcomed the Borsad effort for social change, calling it "a task more valuable and more difficult than that of merely fighting the Government".⁵⁸

The fear that Congress would split in two induced Gandhi to yield to the Swarajists, just as it had earlier influenced Vallabhbhai and C.R. While expecting the Swarajists "to retrace their steps when experience has disillusioned them",⁵⁹ the Mahatma was certain, as he told Rajaji in a letter, that "we cannot embarrass the Swarajists" or "obstruct them".⁶⁰ But he would try to block a slide-back to Congress's pre-1920 state. A neat division of influence was Gandhi's first solution: the Swarajists should sit in the councils and only no-changers should sit in Congress's offices. Fierce Swarajist hostility forced Gandhi to withdraw the proposal.

An alternative proposal of his, novel for a political movement anywhere, was considered by the AICC when it met in Ahmedabad in June 1924. In the chair was Muhammad Ali, who had been made Congress President the previous December. Gandhi recommended that membership of Congress committees be confined to those furnishing self-spun yarn: what drill was to the soldier, the Mahatma wanted spinning to be to a Congressman. The Swarajists present in Ahmedabad at once saw that Gandhi's stipulation would result in no-changer domination in Congress, for most no-changers, at this juncture, were spinners, and most spinners were no-changers. Vehemently opposing the proposal, several Swarajists walked out when it was put to vote. As soon as it was passed, by 67 votes to 37, Gandhi sought to placate his opponents. He removed, from the new rule, a "penal" clause which laid down that a Congress official not regularly turning in the requisite quantity of self-spun yarn would lose his post.

Chitta Ranjan Das and his Swarajist followers came close to defeating another Gandhi resolution in which the murder of an Englishman was condemned – there were many Congressmen with whom the Mahatma's word was no longer law. He could, however, continue to count on Vallabhbhai, who as the GPCC chief was the AICC's host. Patel frequently left the deliberations "to attend to all manner of 'housekeeping' problems" and missed more than one crucial debate, but that didn't prevent him from saying, whenever he returned, "I support Gandhiji". He was called the Mahatma's "blind follower" in consequence.⁶¹ At his instance the GPCC resolved that each of its committee members would turn in 3,000 yards of self-spun yarn a month – a thousand yards more than what Gandhi had stipulated.

In September the Mahatma went on a 21-day fast in Muhammad Ali's home in Delhi. Hindu-Muslim unity, a jewel mined in 1919 and 1920, was cracking. To Gandhi, India presented a picture where "to revile one another's religion, to make reckless statements, to utter untruths, to break the heads of innocent men and to desecrate temples or mosques" was the order of the day.⁶² The fast was his response.

Gandhi to Patel, 16.9.24: *I am sure you are already aware of my decision. You have the heart of a lion; you will not therefore be perturbed at all. On the other hand, you will work all the harder for the common cause.*⁶³

A subsequent letter from Gandhi's camp discloses the Mahatma's trust in Vallabhbhai.

Mahadev to Patel, 22.10.24: *Whatever may happen on the Hindu-Muslim front in Gujarat, as long as you are there Bapu is at peace. If a storm occurs despite your presence, Bapu will assume that it was not possible to prevent it.*⁶⁴

Gandhi's fast touched many and improved Delhi's climate for the time being but did not restore Hindu-Muslim trust in any lasting sense. His next move was a gesture towards the Swarajists. On mere suspicion the Raj had arrested, in Bengal, a number of Das's followers. Subhas Chandra Bose was one of them. Deciding that the Swarajists under attack needed all his support, Gandhi announced that he would persuade Congress to agree that the Swarajists in the councils were there not merely with Congress's permission but "on behalf of Congress".

Only too aware of Congress disharmony, Vallabhbhai had spoken, in a letter to Mahadev, of "thirty-six tunes" being played; the Government, he had added, "could be brought to its senses" if only "the people were of one mind".⁶⁵ Gandhi's latest gesture was a bid towards that goal. Moreover, he got something substantial from the Swarajists in exchange: a wholesale extension of his yarn requirement, which Ahmedabad had confined to members of Congress committees. Das and Nehru now agreed that all Congressmen, including Swarajists, would purchase their membership of Congress with yarn. If Gandhi was yielding Congress to the Swarajists, they would have to yield themselves to spinning.

In December 1924 the Mahatma presided over a Congress session for the first and last time in his life. It was held in Belgaum. Das, Motilal and C.R. had urged Gandhi to accept the chair. Vallabhbhai saw little merit or necessity in making the Mahatma president: with or without the title, he was Congress's guide. Gandhi had agreed with Vallabhbhai but after his pact with Das and Nehru he accepted the presidentship. In Belgaum Das said that his faith in spinning was robust, and the pact was ratified, but Vithalbhai stood with the small minority that opposed it.

* * *

The composition of Gandhi's Working Committee reflected his policy of placating Das and Nehru. Vallabhbhai and C.R. were excluded from the Congress "cabinet". A WorCom battling the Raj would have needed their skills, not the one that Gandhi formed at the end of 1924. Vallabhbhai and C.R. were freed for constructive work. Rajaji would soon start an ashram in one of South India's most arid districts, and work there for khadi and against liquor and untouchability. The constructive role of Vallabhbhai, who retained his

GPCC presidentship, would be implemented through "a group of workers whom he trained and nursed, and whom he inspired with the ideals of service which Gandhiji had been preaching".⁶⁶

Giving up their influence in Congress's national network was not a painless exercise for either Patel or C.R. Less reticent than Vallabhbhai, Rajaji was probably speaking for both when, in a letter to Devadas, he referred to a temptation "to tramp the country all over India and address meetings as of old".⁶⁷ But he had given his word to start an ashram and did so in February 1925. As for Vallabhbhai, he not only had the GPCC and his band of social workers to look after; he had accepted, from February 1924, an additional burden, the presidentship of the Ahmedabad municipality.

It was in the previous October that Patel had first thought of returning to the city council. The Mahatma was then in prison, the Delhi Congress in which council-entry was permitted had just ended, and Vallabhbhai's preparations for the Borsad battle had just begun. The Raj announced that the officials who had governed Ahmedabad since the February 1922 suspension of the municipality would hand over their responsibility to an elected municipal council. Fresh rules for municipal bodies, linked to the Reforms Act of 1919, would make the new city council more representative and more influential than the council of which Patel was a member from 1917 to 1922. Moreover, Congress had never resolved to boycott city councils. They provided a link with the citizen.

The only question was whether the Raj would let Vallabhbhai govern the city. He couldn't wait for an answer. A sword hanging over some 360 teachers who had stood by him in 1921-22 clinched his decision. We have seen how, taking a large risk, municipal teachers had taken part in Patel's bid at that time to affirm the city council's autonomy. After the February 1922 suspension of the municipality, some 160 teachers out of the total of 360 left the municipality and joined schools started by Vallabhbhai and his friends. A People's Primary Education Association, or the Kelavani Mandal, was formed to run the new schools. Within weeks the Mandal, which charged no fees and paid its teachers out of donations, had more pupils on its rolls than the municipality. At the end of 1923, 9,300 children were in Mandal schools, and about 6,500 in municipal schools.

Yet the Mandal was finding it increasingly difficult to raise donations and had been obliged to borrow Rs 1 1/2 lakh. While the future of the 160 Mandal teachers thus seemed uncertain, the 200 teachers who had remained with the municipality heard that their 1921 disobedience was likely to cost them their pensions. Patel and his friends chose to meet the situation with a drive to capture the

municipality. If it was in their hands, they might be able to help both lots of teachers.

Polling took place on January 30, 1924, three weeks after the Raj had conceded Vallabhbhai's Borsad triumph and two days before the Mahatma's release. Standing under the Congress banner, Patel's carefully-picked candidates won 35 of the 48 elected seats. Among the winners was an untouchable. Though 12 seats were filled by Government nominees, Vallabhbhai, who was elected President by a large majority, was in no danger of being outvoted.

There is a synchronism in the careers of Patel and Jawaharlal. Earlier we had noted the simultaneity of their law studies in London. Their becoming municipal presidents at about the same time should now be recorded. Jawaharlal became Allahabad's municipal president shortly before the Ahmedabad election. The Vithalbhai-Vallabhbhai parallelism is also striking. Two months after Vallabhbhai's assumption of his Ahmedabad office, the older brother was elevated as Bombay's municipal president. Chitta Ranjan Das found himself leading the Calcutta municipality at this juncture, and Rajendra Prasad would soon head Patna's town council. Denied power at the national or provincial level, Congress's stalwarts were willing to exercise civic leadership.

A Raj-Vallabhbhai compromise soon ended the teachers' troubles. The Mandal closed its schools and the municipality absorbed the 160 teachers who had left it for the Mandal, treating their absence from municipal service as leave without pay. The threat of a penal loss of pension was withdrawn by the Government, which also removed an irritant by agreeing that its inspection of municipal schools would only be "of an advisory character".⁶⁸

Vallabhbhai ensured, in addition, that a Rs 1 1/2 lakh grant went from the municipality to the Mandal, enabling the latter to clear its debt.

There was sarcasm but also pique in the *Times of India's* description of the grant as "a happy family affair". Pointing out that "the president of the Mandal to whom the grant is given is Mr Vallabhbhai Patel, president of the present municipality himself", and that Mr Balwantrao Thakore, the chairman of the municipality's schools committee, "was until a week back the secretary of the same Mandal", the British-owned newspaper attacked the grant as "wholly unwarranted and unjustifiable".⁶⁹ The "family affair" was also, from start to finish, wholly candid and public, and Patel was not troubled by the comment. As far as he was concerned, the grant merely enabled citizens to pay for their children's schooling.

Another promise was redeemed when Vallabhbhai compelled the cantonment to pay for its water. We know that he had wanted this to happen in 1920. But the Government had intervened, and the

cantonment continued to get municipal water for virtually nothing. Now, at Patel's instance, the municipality demanded arrears from 1920-21, adding that water would otherwise be switched off. The Collector "reasoned" with him on the cantonment's behalf but Vallabhbhai was sure of his ground and held to it. Within six months of becoming President he had won the battle. Not only did the cantonment pay up; it also agreed, under pressure from the municipality, to find its own water from May 1925.

Two months later another win was recorded. The High Court rejected a suit by the Government to recover Rs. 168,000 from Patel and 18 other members of the previous city council. The Government's suit was in pursuance of Pratt's 1921 threat that money would be recovered from individual councillors if the council "illegally" paid salaries to "rebellious" teachers. An Ahmedabad court rejected the suit in April 1923 but the Government went on appeal to the Bombay High Court. Among the advocates engaged by Vallabhbhai and his friends for the High Court battle was M. A. Jinnah. In November 1924, Chief Justice Macleod and Justice Crump pronounced that misuse of funds had not been proved and asked the Government to bear the defendants' costs. Patel had been vindicated and Pratt, no longer in India, had lost, but something had been salvaged for the British by their judges.

President Vallabhbhai also headed the council's managing committee and the town planning board, not minding talk that he was concentrating power in his hands. He had joined the council to do his utmost, not to project a democrat's image. He was similarly unaffected by the accusation that he was favouring friends. If Dr Kanuga, who became sanitary committee chairman, and Thakore, the schools committee head, were close to him, they were capable men as well, and he would certainly use them. Though chairing several committees, Patel was not, according to Kuberdas Mody, a fellow-councillor at the time and later a critic, "autocratic". Mody would recollect that Patel sought every member's view and "strove for a consensus".⁷⁰

Vallabhbhai's strongest asset, however, was his application. Every morning he walked from ward to ward or drove to work-sites, an engineer or overseer at his side. Every afternoon he received aggrieved citizens. Responding to his example, the municipality's employees worked harder. He could claim solid achievements. Only a third of Ahmedabad had drainage when Vallabhbhai took over. All of the city had it by the time he ended his term in 1928. Drawing in more water for the town and extending the system for distributing it, he took care to involve the Bombay government's top engineer, a Briton, in his water schemes, thereby protecting them from the Raj's disfavour.⁷¹ Half of Ahmedabad was electrified by 1928.⁷² He acquired

for the city, 21 acres of the ground along the Sabarmati on which he had organized the end-1921 Congress. On this site a hospital rose after Patel left the municipality; he had obtained large donations for it from the Sarabhais and the Chinais. For extending primary education, a register of all children was prepared.

His plans for reducing the city's congestion were bitterly opposed. He was called anti-peasant when he favoured the development of areas away from the walled town, and anti-Muslim when he supported an earlier proposal for demolishing a portion of the wall built by past Muslim rulers. The wall being a fine specimen of period architecture, several non-Muslims joined the opposition to demolition, but Vallabhbhai received no answer when he asked for an alternative solution and the demolition was begun. The anti-Muslim charge was repeated when he declared that graves illegally constructed on municipal roads would be moved elsewhere. They were, too. Jains and Hindus were offended when Patel backed a drive against rats and stray dogs and did not prevent the killing of decrepit cattle. Jains objecting to the capture of stray dogs were asked by him "to show the dogs pity by keeping them in their homes",⁷³ and Hindus urging him to "stop the Muslims from killing old cattle" also received an uncomfortable retort: "Who sells these cattle to the Muslim butchers?"⁷⁴ Everyone knew that Hindus sold them.

The anti-peasant charge stung Vallabhbhai, who was ever proud of his rural origin. But he refrained, while answering the charge, from employing the politician's standard weapon in a difficult situation, hypocrisy. His words to peasants affected by his Ellis Bridge town planning scheme were candid: "No one says that the proposed scheme has been framed in the interests of the peasants. It is made in the interests of the city." But he offered them a fair price for their lands, provided they were truly peasants. He wouldn't truck, he declared, with "vultures who keep grabbing peasants' land", people who were "peasants in name only".⁷⁵ Patel was not going to let bogus peasants make a killing at the city's expense.

He went to at least three public meetings organized by critics of the Ellis Bridge scheme. Unlike many leaders of later times, he was willing to face his foes. We should note, however, that while his interventions at these meetings have a courageous, open and persuasive ring, they also sound impatient, arrogant and intimidatory in places. He told one gathering of peasants and other critics in September 1925: "I do not need your signature. If you want to use your brain, use it."⁷⁶ At another meeting, where charges of "dividing the people" and loving his chair were levelled against him, Vallabhbhai retorted:

*Please do not try to play that trick on me. Be sure that I will not be defeated in it. I will say a few bitter things and you will not like it. To be goody-goody is not my style.*⁷⁷

Coming from a man of his strength, words such as these probably frightened some critics, but they should be seen in their context. They were not baseless; vultures were certainly not absent from the scene. Also, Vallabhbhai's "threatening" remarks were generally preceded and followed by appeals to reason. Thus he said at the end of one of these meetings: "I do not want your consent now. Think it over and then come to me. My doors are open for you."⁷⁸ Viewed as a whole, the episode of the Ellis Bridge scheme establishes Patel as a democrat who is willing, despite his large council majority, to confront his critics and hear them. This democrat is also, of course, an outspoken Patidar with faith in his views. "If I feel that some good of the people is involved in doing a particular thing," he told one of the meetings, "I shall continue doing it."⁷⁹

Vallabhbhai's "masterful manner" was also noted by a young Englishwoman called Madeleine Slade, an Admiral's daughter, who arrived in Ahmedabad in November 1925. She was joining the Mahatma's Ashram, and Vallabhbhai, Mahadev Desai and Swami Anand had gone to the station to meet her. As Miss Slade, soon to be known as Mirabehn, would afterwards recall, Vallabhbhai "turned to Mahadev and said, 'You two look after the luggage and I'll take her off in the car.' " "Before I knew where I was," adds Mirabehn, "I found myself being swept away in the car, this new acquaintance sitting by my side." Yet Miss Slade also observed what foes of the Ellis Bridge scheme had missed: "I looked at his face and was struck by its power curiously intermingled with a kindly and humorous expression."⁸⁰

As for the scheme itself, 67 individuals started a cooperative housing society and the municipality backed it, but governmental clearances were slow in coming and Patel was unable to honour a proud claim he had made. "I will make sure," he had said, "that within six months a new township comes up there."⁸¹ Neither the Ellis Bridge scheme nor another controversial project that Vallabhbhai supported, the Kalupur Relief Road, which necessitated the demolition of several residential buildings and the splitting up of pols (community lanes), would be completed during Patel's tenure.

Some of his steps proclaimed a message. Ripon Hall in Ahmedabad was renamed Gandhi Hall; Gujarat Vidyapith's degrees were recognized for municipal posts; boys and girls in municipal schools were taught spinning; and it was decided to use khadi rather than foreign cloth for uniforms for the municipality's staff.⁸² These gestures needled the Raj but its officials were prepared to

acknowledge Vallabhbhai's industry and drive. Collector J. H. Garrett informed the Government of Bombay in 1925 that the municipality had been "very active in the disposal of business" and added, "Much credit is due... to the present board and its President for infusing a new life into municipal administration."⁸³ Two years later, the Commissioner of the Northern Division, W. W. Smart, spoke of "the enthusiasm with which various departments of the municipality were functioning".⁸⁴ That Patel's council was "prompt and ready to observe official proprieties" was also admitted by Collector Garrett.⁸⁵

Serving in Allahabad, Jawaharlal too was working with "vigour and enthusiasm", and impressing colleagues and the Raj's officials, but his style was different. "Memoranda flowed from his pen on issues great and small – education, sanitation, prostitution, the removing of billboards which disfigured the city, and the like."⁸⁶ Rather than notes, Vallabhbhai would send an emissary, a councillor or municipal official, to the locality that had a problem, and make the emissary responsible for tackling it. By the beginning of the second year of his term Jawaharlal was "anxious to resign",⁸⁷ worn out by the petty corruption in the municipal staff, by the municipality's total dependence on the provincial treasury and by the provincial government's habit of sitting on the municipality's proposals. These were Patel's problems too. He spoke, in a 1927 address, of the "financial problem" as "the most important single hurdle" for civic bodies and also attacked the provincial government's dilatory conduct, of which he gave an example: "Our scheme for compulsory education is lying with the Government for the past three years! Whatever scheme we send up seems to be merely placed in a pigeon-hole."⁸⁸

While these factors did not instill in him a wish to leave his post, other circumstances did. In September 1926 he resigned because he felt that some of his colleagues were not taking their responsibilities seriously. Some grievances, he complained, were "not being attended to for months"; this, he added, was all the more deplorable "at a time when we have secured considerable freedom from official interference".⁸⁹ He withdrew his resignation under pressure, but, as we shall soon see, only to resign again, abruptly and irrevocably, in April 1928. Vithalbhai, we may note here, left his Bombay chair in August 1925 for a seat of greater distinction: he was elected President of the Central Assembly.

* * *

Heavy rains lashed Ahmedabad on the evening of Saturday, July 23, 1927. "On Sunday everyone thought that heavy though the rainfall had been, it would stop in a while."⁹⁰ It did not stop. On Sunday evening a powerful wind joined the thick rain. Vallabhbhai

was alone in his house – Mani was with Gandhi and Kasturba in the Nandi Hills in the south, and Dahya too was away. He could not go to sleep that Sunday night. At midnight he got out of his bed and out of his house, having made up his mind to see what was happening to his city. By now thunder had joined the rain and the wind. Feeling that it would be sensible to have someone at his side Patel knocked at the house of a merchant called Harilal Kapadia, who opened the door. Before Kapadia could ask a completely drenched Vallabhbhai what he was doing at that hour, Patel asked him to make some tea.

Giving the visitor a change of clothing, Kapadia started making tea. He was then asked by Vallabhbhai to join him on a tour to find out how different parts of the city were faring. Kapadia glanced at his walls, which were being whipped by the wind and the rain, and wondered which of them would collapse first. Then he set out with Patel. They moved about until dawn (July 25). The rain did not stop for a minute during their inspection, which ended at the house of the municipal engineer, Gore, whom they woke up. The three then proceeded to the municipal office, where officials and employees were at once summoned and instructed. Culverts were enlarged; on his orders, the road over one culvert was broken to quicken the flow of water into the Sabarmati.

The rain did not cease. Vallabhbhai found time, in his office, to write a long chatty letter to Gandhi and another letter to Mani, thanking her for the dhotis she had sent for him.⁹¹ Neither letter breathes a word about the storm. That evening houses started to collapse. The rain did not cease: it would not, until July 29. Receiving, on an average, 30 inches of rain a year, Ahmedabad would now get 52 inches in six consecutive days. Working round the clock for three or four days, Patel and Gore organized a heroic effort to drain the flooding waters and remove debris.

It was impossible, in the first few days, to tell what was happening outside Ahmedabad, for no trains, letters or telegrams were coming through. Putting aside his inhibitions, the Collector of Ahmedabad sought Vallabhbhai's help. The district of Kheda, he said, was in deep trouble. Much of it was under three feet of water. In Kheda town, all residents had taken refuge on the high ground on which the Collector's house stood and were in desperate need of food. Could Vallabhbhai do something? Indeed he would. Getting hold of quantities of rice, wheat, sugar and kerosene, Patel moved the stuff, along with volunteers, to Ahmedabad station and thence, somehow, to Mehmedabad and finally to Kheda town, where Collector Reginald Maxwell hailed the supplies as "a blessing from heaven".⁹²

Weak from a recent illness, Gandhi wired from Nandi Hills asking if he should come. Patel answered that the problem was staggering enough, but Gujarat had learned the lesson of self-reliance that

Gandhi had been teaching over the years. His presence, Vallabhbhai added, was not essential. The days that followed saw a superb organizer grappling with a staggering problem. Crops and cattle had been washed away, people were starving, and 75,000 houses had collapsed. People sought safety in treetops and found snakes joining them. Sixty-one Bhils climbed three trees on the bank of the river Dhadhar and clung to the branches for four days. On the fifth day, famished children and old men and women started to slip and drop to the ground; thirty-one perished in this fashion.

As soon as the rain stopped, scores of volunteers proceeded to centres that Patel had chosen – by train and road where possible, wading, swimming or floating on inflated bags the rest of the way. Once in their posts, their job was to receive and distribute the foodgrains, clothes and medicines that followed them. They found that prejudice had collapsed along with houses. In one village Muslims and untouchables were sheltered in an orthodox temple, in another caste Hindus were given space on the higher slope where the untouchables lived. Elsewhere untouchables stood on mounds that were their houses. Devastating as it was, the disappearance of some whole villages offered a chance to rebuild them on new and rational lines: five or six villages were thus recreated by some of Vallabhbhai's volunteers.

Money came in, first from a large number of ordinary citizens, then from friends of Congress in Bombay and Ahmedabad, and finally from a Government surprised by the speed with which Patel had erected a relief network across Gujarat. What the volunteers asked for was immediately obtained and sent by Vallabhbhai – seeds for the next crop, building material or agricultural implements, all sold at the lowest possible rate. "Even a letter in pencil" would rouse Patel to action.⁹³ Trained over the years by the Mahatma and Vallabhbhai, the volunteers asked for the minimum and tried to see that distribution was fair. Gandhi, writing from the Nandi Hills, and Ravishankar Maharaj, who based himself in Kheda, urged traders to reduce rather than raise the price of wheat, rice and sugar. Though contrary to the traders' inclinations, the plea was heeded.⁹⁴ When the Governor of Bombay toured Kheda in September, the peasants did not ask for food or clothing. All they wanted from the Government was a loan to rebuild a house or restart cultivation.

Impressed by the role of the volunteers and the GPCC workers, the Raj took an unprecedented decision. It agreed that in each affected area an official and a Congressman named by Patel would jointly pick the neediest – untouchables, Patidars, Baraiyas, Muslims or whoever – and allocate loans. Arriving from Delhi at the end of September, Vithalbhai, President of the Central Assembly, also created a

precedent. He announced that he had come "to work *under* Vallabhbhai Patel, the president of the GPCC".⁹⁵ Vithalbhai was instrumental in bringing the new Viceroy, Lord Irwin, and his wife, Lady Irwin, to Kheda in December. Vallabhbhai and some of his volunteers attended the garden party that Vithalbhai gave in Nadiad in honour of the Viceregal pair. Not hesitating to pay a tribute to foes of the past and perhaps also of the future, Irwin said on the occasion that "if the volunteers of the Gujarat Provincial Committee had not arrived in the flood-affected areas in time, the loss of life instead of being negligible would have been very heavy".⁹⁶

Another gesture came from Joseph Garrett, former Collector of Ahmedabad, who had been named special officer for flood relief. He asked Vallabhbhai for permission to recommend his name and the names of some of his colleagues for suitable honours. At this Patel "burst out laughing".⁹⁷ What interested him more than Garrett's feeler was the fact that for the first time since they had become grown men, all five sons of Karamsad's Jhaverbhai and Nadiad's Ladba were together in Nadiad. Motakaka had been dead for 13 years but, dressed in widow's black, Ladba was with them. Someone had the sensible idea to take a picture, the only one existing of the mother with her brood of widowers.

* * *

A new council came into being in 1927. It re-elected Vallabhbhai President but his majority was reduced. Among the new members were Ambalal Sarabhai and Kasturbhai Lalbhai, Ahmedabad's biggest industrialists, and Gulzarilal Nanda, leader of the textile workers, who would serve as acting Prime Minister of India in 1964 and again in 1966. A difference with these three on the appointment of a new Chief Officer resulted in Patel's resignation. Among the candidates for the post were H. L. Dewan, Ishwarlal Bhagat and Morarji Desai, who would become Prime Minister of India 49 years later.

Bhagat, who had been Chief Officer on probation in 1925, had several friends on the council but Vallabhbhai was not one of them. In 1925 he had made serious allegations against Gore, the municipal engineer. An enquiry jointly conducted by Patel and Sir Ramanbhai, who had headed the 1919-22 council, established that Bhagat's charges were baseless and destroyed Vallabhbhai's confidence in him. Subsequent events increased Patel's unease. Papers concerning Bhagat's previous record, including an adverse comment by ex-Collector Chatfield, had disappeared from the municipal archives. More serious in Vallabhbhai's view was Bhagat's alleged attempt to

sow division among the councillors. In consequence, Bhagat was demoted to the post of personal assistant to the Chief Officer.

Ambalal, Kasturbhai and Gulzarilal recommended the name of Desai, who was a government servant at the time, and Mavlankar supported the suggestion. Patel, who had assured Dewan of his backing, expressed disagreement. He also told Ambalal and the others that he would quit if Bhagat was chosen. The council voted on the question on April 13. In a three-cornered contest, Bhagat emerged ahead of both Dewan and Desai, with Desai getting more votes than Dewan.

The minute he heard the result, Vallabhbhai picked up pen and paper and wrote out his resignation: "As I am convinced that I am not able to command that confidence of the Board which is essential for the good and efficient administration of the city, I feel bound to tender my resignation as President."⁹⁸ A few hours later he was on a train to Bardoli. His municipal career was over. In a message rushed to Patel, Ambalal urged him not to treat Bhagat's appointment as a vote against him, and a resolution requesting Vallabhbhai to reconsider his decision was passed by 44 votes to 2, but the chapter had been closed. Mavlankar later wrote that Patel moved, as a result, from a well to an ocean. This, as we shall see, was probably true, but the fact remains that the victor of many an important battle had lost a trivial one.

The Bhagat episode must have embittered Patel but it did not, in the end, colour his appraisal of his municipal phase. Twenty years later, replying to a civic tribute that Bombay gave him, he would say:

*You have mentioned several achievements. Some I have achieved and some I have not. But there is one thing which I accept without reservation, namely, that I served Ahmedabad municipality to the best of my ability. I had unalloyed happiness in the tasks I performed then....To tackle the dirt of the city is quite different from tackling politics. From the former you get a good night's rest, while the latter keeps you worried and disturbed even at night.*⁹⁹

* * *

A lull in India's fight against the British coincided with Vallabhbhai's municipal spell, which filled the period between January 1924, when he led the Borsad struggle, and the summer of 1928, when he would lead the bigger battle of Bardoli. But Gandhi and his large army had not retired. Their "constructive work" was both an end and a means. While it raised the social or economic level of many of their compatriots, it also kept soldiers in trim, strengthened

their links with the masses and brought them fresh recruits. It was preparation for battle. The lull also enabled some of the off-duty soldiers to learn or practise administration. Neither Patel nor Jawaharlal knew in the mid-1920s that they would one day lead a government of free India but their experience of municipal administration proved useful when national power came to them.

Grappling with Indian weaknesses, and not just British ones, was also made possible by the lull. Though his civic burden took up most of his time, there were spells in 1925, 1926 and 1927 when Vallabhbhai stumped the countryside and remote towns. Often he and the Mahatma toured together, to attack untouchability, or poverty (for which the Mahatma's cure, faithfully prescribed by Patel as well, was khadi), or dowry or liquor. While drawing numerous hearers, they couldn't excite, convert or enlist many. After Gandhi had addressed, in January 1925, a Godhra gathering, Vallabhbhai said: "As I want to know where we stand, I watch and observe your faces to find out whether the words of Bapu create as deep an impression on your hearts today as they used to three years ago. It is this man alone who will bring us Swaraj.... We shall then make merry. Now tell me, how many of you are going to contribute 2,000 yards of yarn?" Only five persons raised their hands – in Patel's own Godhra.¹⁰⁰

At a large meeting a week later in the princely state of Bhavnagar, the Dewan, Sir Prabhashankar Pattani, took a vow of spinning. When untouchability was discussed at this meeting, Vallabhbhai's contribution was brief and direct. "I am going," he announced, "to the untouchable quarters this evening at 6 p.m. for the darshan of the untouchable brothers." However, his Bhavnagar hosts did not know where the untouchables lived, and wasted an hour dragging him along paths that led elsewhere. At Bhuvasan, not far from Bardoli, Patel asked spinners among the five or seven hundred listeners to identify themselves. "Only three persons raised their hands."¹⁰¹

A tour in late 1925 of the princely state of Kutch was among the least heartening. "A whole night's killing journey of 28 miles in bullock carts brought us to Kothara," Mahadev Desai would recall. All they found in Kothara was "a noisy gathering". Vallabhbhai went to the untouchables confined in the rear and brought some of them forward to the "joint" block. "But caste Hindus who sat in that block were negligible in number," recorded Mahadev. Most caste Hindus sat in a block reserved exclusively for them, a feature, be it noted, of several anti-untouchability meetings of the time.¹⁰² Untouchability had stubborn roots in Kutch's soil. At one meeting in the port town of Mandvi, the chairman "threw" the welcome address that he had read into the hands of the Mahatma, who was seated some feet away: having mingled with Mandvi's untouchables, Gandhi had become one of them and could not be touched. He could only be honoured!¹⁰³

Desai observed that Patel often "laughed out the blues with pranks". The diarist gives an instance:

At one of our halts (in Kutch) we were very deliberately given quite a separate room for our meal and served not in the usual brass vessels but in leaf-dishes and leaf-bowls, so that even their vessels might not be polluted by our use. Just then Vallabhbhai, assuming a very serious air, introduced Gandhiji's nephew, Krishnadas, to the servers in the following terms:

"But do you know why our whole party attends upon him (Krishnadas) with such care? Because he is an untouchable, and untouchables you know are such hot favourites of Gandhiji! That's what makes the whole party fawn on Krishnadas." The servers, poor men, were shocked and stopped serving us. And once Vallabhbhai is at it, he knows how to keep up a joke he has begun. All our efforts to [convince] the servers that Krishnadas was not an untouchable came to nothing.¹⁰⁴

People in Kutch had heard of Gandhi's welcome into his ashram of an untouchable called Dudhabhai and of his attempt to bring up Dudhabhai's daughter Lakshmi as his child. Lakshmi was not in the party travelling through Kutch but Patel, "in all seriousness", would often point to a little girl in the group and describe her to his hosts as the untouchable Lakshmi. If, as Narhari Parikh suggests, this act "enabled Gandhiji to get a true picture of untouchability in Kutch", it also made life harder for the travellers and his hosts. At times the party could find no one to cook their meals for them, and the houses where they halted had to be washed after their departure.

Mercifully, some places offered cheer. In the Chhagam village of Bhadran in the Charotar, some men listening to Gandhi in February 1925 "quietly got up from their seats and began to remove the fence which was separating the antyajas (untouchables) from others". When the Mahatma asked the audience if they supported the fence-removers, "a forest of hands sprang up, and only one hand was raised in dissent".¹⁰⁶

Gandhi also touched at Bhadran on the Patidars' attachment to dowry, calling it an "odious custom".¹⁰⁷ In Borsad town, Vallabhbhai truthfully yet cautiously claimed, also in February 1925, that "there has been a reduction, at present, in the number of crimes". He attributed the improvement to "the fact that a few pure souls have made friendships with the habitual criminals among [the Baraiyas and Patanvadiyas] and succeeded in reforming them."¹⁰⁸

A year later Patel addressed a Baraiya gathering in Ramesara in the Panchmahals district: "I have not come to preach to you anything that

is originally mine, since a preacher ought to be a man of austere and saintly life, which I am not. I have come here only to say what Gandhiji has asked me to tell you." After his words a Baraiya group sat down with Vallabhbhai and "took detailed instructions from him". Mahadev, who had accompanied Patel to Ramesara, where one of their co-workers, Laxmidas Asar, had spent about three years, felt that "the seeds that Sri Laxmidas sowed... have sprouted".¹⁰⁹

Also encouraging, if in a different way, were expressions like the one made in the presence of Gandhi and Patel by the Thakore (ruler) of Rajkot, who opened a national school in his state in February 1925. Said the Thakore: "Why should Rajputs not be Gandhiji's followers? I myself wish to be Gandhiji's lieutenant. Why may I not surpass even Vallabhbhai?"¹¹⁰ The Thakore couldn't have imagined that his son would be engaged in a protracted fight with the Mahatma and Patel in 1939, or that some years thereafter Vallabhbhai would influence the fate of his throne.

Some facts of life would take Patel by surprise. In April 1926 he and C.R., who was on a visit to Gujarat, went together to a meeting in Ahmedabad of several hundred young boys, sons of mill workers. Shankerlal Banker, Anasuya Sarabhai and a few others were trying to train them. Requested, as a visiting guest, to speak to the boys, C.R. asked them, "How many of you have tasted liquor?" After the question was translated, up rose over two hundred hands. "Can this be?" exclaimed Vallabhbhai. "These tender children?" The question was repeated "in the clearest Gujarati", but "not one hand went down".¹¹¹

* * *

Gandhi made a prescient statement in Bardoli on January 17, 1925. He and Vallabhbhai were together visiting the taluka that would have launched an attack on the Raj in February 1922 had Gandhi not abruptly cancelled it. Fervour had ebbed here too, but after uttering frank words on Bardoli's half-hearted effort against untouchability and on its treatment of bonded labourers, the Mahatma said:

*I for one am never going to give up my hope for Bardoli....I have come here to say to Vallabhbhai also that if he wills it he can, by his power and influence, retrieve Bardoli's glory.... I am not asking people today to go to jail. We shall go to jail in future.... At present the times are quite unsuitable."*¹¹²

The Mahatma left Patel's company for Kohat in the North West Frontier, where Hindu-Muslim riots had occurred the previous September. On Congress's behalf, Gandhi and Shaukat Ali made an

inquiry into the riots. Gandhi concluded that bribery and coercion had been used in Kohat to convert Hindus to Islam, but Shaukat Ali was not willing to say so and the Mahatma, who from 1918 had made the Ali brothers' causes his own, was bitterly disappointed. He was met at Ahmedabad station on his return by Vallabhbhai, who asked him as they drove to the Ashram, "How did things go at Kohat?"

"I learnt much that was quite new to me," said the Mahatma. "A veritable fire was raging within me.... But Ansari saw my point clearly." "That proves that you were right to do that heavy penance for Kohat and the other troubles?" asked Vallabhbhai, referring to Gandhi's 21-day fast. "I wish I could wind up all outer work and tie myself down to the Ashram," said Gandhi. "How long can a man live in this filthy political atmosphere? It seems politics is not for a man like me." "What shall we do then?" asked Vallabhbhai, implying that he too would leave politics if the Mahatma did.

"What else? The same thing, of course, which we have been doing.... We have got to do what we must." His Kohat trip had shaken Gandhi but he wasn't going to heed the temptation to quit.¹¹³

Chitta Ranjan Das suddenly died in June 1925, shortly after making an offer to the Raj. Gandhi, who was Congress President at the time, responded to Das's death by yielding even more of Congress to the Swarajists. His yarn rule was made optional. C.R., wearing himself out for khadi, wrote to Devadas from his ashram that he felt cheated. We may be certain that Vallabhbhai too was surprised and hurt, for he had worked strenuously to enforce the yarn rule. But he did not feel cheated. His faith was in Gandhi, not in his rules, which, as far as Patel was concerned, the Mahatma was entitled to alter. Unlike C.R., Vallabhbhai went to the Kanpur session of Congress, held in December 1925 and presided over by Sarojini Naidu. But he was there only because Gandhi was, and took no part in the deliberations of what now was a Swarajist-dominated body.

There was a heated dispute, shortly before the Kanpur session, between Motilal Nehru and three Maharashtrian Swarajists, Jayakar, Kelkar and Moonje, who resigned their seats. Then, in 1926, Lajpat Rai left the Swarajists and helped Malaviya form the pro-Hindu Independent Congress Party. Setting out to obstruct the Raj, the Swarajists appeared better at obstructing one another. Patel's distrust of councils was thus being vindicated, but neither he nor the Mahatma were ready yet to lead another charge at the Raj. The times were not suitable, yet.

Dahyabhai had graduated from the Vidyapith at the end of 1924. In February 1925, at the age of 21, he married. Yashoda, the bride – a kinswoman of Darbar Gopaldas's wife Bhaktiba –, was from the village of Virsad, once in the same top gol as Karamsad but later involved in a feud with it. Neither village gave daughters to the other, and Vallabhbhai's choice of a Virsad girl for his son was bitterly resented in his village. The Mahatma was pressed by Vallabhbhai to officiate at the Dahya-Yashoda wedding, which took place in Gandhi's Ashram. The feasts and celebrations that have ruined countless families were wholly eliminated, and no dowry was asked for or taken.

Eleven years later Vallabhbhai repeated his offence: he backed the marriage of Vimla, his brother Somabhai's granddaughter, with a Virsad boy. One indignant Karamsad Patidar exclaimed that Vallabhbhai had become a Bawo (recluse or mendicant). Vallabhbhai's retort to the pejorative remark was in choice Patidar style: "I will make seven generations of his family Bawas before becoming one myself." The Karamsad-Virsad feud was not, it would seem, an entirely closed chapter even in September 1987.¹¹⁴

The possibility of Dahyabhai working for Ghanshyamdas Birla evidently arose, and Gandhi wrote to Vallabhbhai: "If Dahyabhai is entrusted to Birlaji, it is likely that he might be put to work in their textile mill. But that would be improper. More of this when we meet. I am discussing the subject with Jamnalalji."¹¹⁵ In the event, Dahyabhai became an insurance agent. His wife and Manibehn did not always get along. To the latter Vallabhbhai wrote: "Be amicable and affectionate towards Yashoda.... Talk of your not getting along with your sister-in-law would bring discredit to the family. Anyone wanting to serve the public needs a thick skin and the ability to swallow both respect and disrespect. It's a lesson to be learnt at home first."¹¹⁶

He was in need of a thick skin himself, for Vithalbhai's communications to him seldom erred on the side of politeness. When he was elected President of the Central Assembly, Vithalbhai wrote as follows to Vallabhbhai:

*There is no reply to my letter. What is the reason? I will be living in Delhi from December 1 and everything should be ready when I get there. Manilal Kothari will have to make the necessary arrangement....He will also have to arrange a cook ahead of time and get there a week ahead.*¹¹⁷

The Mahatma, meanwhile, was urging Manibehn "to serve Father with heart and soul" and reminding her of "the heavy responsibilities Father is loaded with".¹¹⁸ We saw earlier that it was

the Mahatma rather than Vallabhbhai who made plans for Manibehn. Graduating from the Vidyapith in November 1924, she spent, at Gandhi's instance, some weeks in 1925 with the Servants of India Society in Poona, and a spell thereafter in Wardha under the care of Jamnalal Bajaj and his wife Janki Devi. A friend noticed that the strong father "choked at Ahmedabad station while farewelling his daughter, and his eyes became wet".¹¹⁹ Later, in a letter to his daughter, Vallabhbhai referred to some of his domestic and neighbourly concerns.

To Manibehn, 17-12-25: Last night, precisely at the midnight hour, Dr Kanuga's young boy Prabhakar died after a week's illness. Nandubehn is bound to feel a heavy blow. Sumitra (the Kanugas' daughter) has been crying a lot. Doctor is a man of great courage. Please write a letter of solace to Nandubehn.

*Your brother and sister-in-law have gone to Delhi. Your sister-in-law finds herself on her own and doesn't like it there. Moreover, your uncle keeps a saheb's house. One doesn't know what arrangements he has for his kitchen etc.*¹²⁰

Readier than either her father or her brother to "belong" to Gandhi's Ashram, Mani became a regular visitor there, turning up on a bicycle she had acquired, perhaps the first Patidar girl to be seen astride a bike in Ahmedabad.¹²¹ In 1926 she lived at the Ashram for several weeks, in the room next to Kasturba's. She would recall an incident:

*When I told Bapuji one Friday that I was going into town and would return in the evening, he said to me, "Leave your key with me. Motilalji is coming to see me. He will rest in your room in the afternoon." After resting in my room Motilalji went to continue his talk with Bapuji and asked him: "Whose room was that? My Anand Bhavan is not as clean and spotless as that." I learnt of this remark much later, when Bapuji, who was inspecting Vidyapith's hostel rooms, quoted it to some students, and one of them repeated it to me.*¹²²

A letter written by the Mahatma to Vallabhbhai in January 1927 suggests that the handover, and takeover, of the responsibility for Manibehn was complete: "Manibehn has no intention to marry for the present at any rate. We must support her to maintain this attitude. You please cease to worry about it and leave it to me."¹²³ Though never summoning the confidence to talk with her father, Manibehn found an ability to take care of him – to fathom his needs and meet them, to cook, fetch and carry for him, to spin thread for his kurtas and dhotis,

to copy the letters he wrote and file the ones he received, to block unwanted visitors, to nurse him when he was ill or tired, and more.

* * *

Congressmen seemed unable to break the political lull. It continued beyond the Kanpur session in December 1925 and well past the Gauhati session a year later. What unexpectedly ended it was an act of the Raj. In November 1927 Viceroy Irwin announced that a Royal Commission headed by Sir John Simon would visit India early in 1928 and make constitutional proposals. People looked at the list of Simon's colleagues and found no Indian in it. Congress leaders like Motilal Nehru and Srinivasa Iyengar, a top southern lawyer who had presided over the Gauhati session, were expectedly angry but even liberals and moderates were annoyed. A consensus to boycott the Commission quickly grew, and the Madras Congress of December 1927 recommended demonstrations against it.

Affirming that Indians could write their constitution themselves, the Madras Congress also asked a committee headed by Motilal Nehru to frame one. Simon and his colleagues, who arrived in India in February 1928, began their labours at about the same time as Motilal and his committee. The slogan "Simon go back" was raised in place after place, crowds assembled and were forcibly dispersed, and many were hurt. Lajpat Rai was one of them, and Jawaharlal another. Not recovering from the blow he suffered, Lajpat Rai died in the autumn of 1928, but by this time Vallabhbhai had hewn a landmark that will not easily wear away. He had won the battle of Bardoli.

* * *

Rivers and streams cut across Bardoli taluka. Its winding roads are lined by jamun, neem, banyan and mango trees and largely appropriated by buffaloes. A part of the terrain is rocky; here the roads do not merely curve, they rise and fall too. 1928, of course, was vastly different from 1987. There were far fewer two-wheelers and four-wheelers on the roads, the road surface was rougher, and the sight, glimpsed in 1987, of a frock-wearing, short-haired woman on a motor-cycle was unthinkable. But the routes were largely the same in 1928, and many trees likewise, and buffaloes and venturesome women were quite integral, we shall see, to the 1928 story. In 1928 the taluka contained 137 villages and had an area of 222 square miles. Jowari, rice, cotton and fruits grew on the rich black soil of the taluka's western portions; the eastern part was rockier, drier and poorer. Remittances from Bardoli's emigrants to east and southern Africa were responsible for brick-and-mortar structures in some villages,

and the taluka as a whole was better off than many other parts of Gujarat, but its peasants were incensed by a large increase in land revenue announced by the Raj.

For two years they had been protesting and petitioning against proposals for an increase. Surat district's representatives in the Bombay Legislative Council had joined in the protest, but the Raj's officials knew best. Though some of them had opposed a large increase, the goading of Bombay presidency's strong-willed Revenue Commissioner, F. G. H. Anderson, carried the day, and in January 1928 the rates for Bardoli taluka were jacked up by 22 per cent. Simultaneously, 23 villages were raised to a higher-taxed category, which meant a double increase for their residents. The reaction of Bardoli's peasants was that they could not accept the new rates.

They knew that there was one man who could turn their dismay into defiance. Anticipating such a moment, Vallabhbhai had indeed made some preparations for it. In 1925 he had accepted the presidency of a federation of ashrams established at four centres in the taluka: Sarbhon, Vankaner, Varad and Bardoli. Rooting themselves to these ashrams, associates of Gandhi and Patel had forged a bond with the villagers; they had taught spinning and weaving to all castes, helped Dublas (the weak) and tribals to read, and rescued villagers from liquor. Vallabhbhai had sensed that one day the bond would be used in battling the Raj.

In November 1927, when the tax axe was about to fall, Vallabhbhai – president, as always, of the GPCC and still heading the Ahmedabad municipality – was urged to involve himself. The group that called on him included Dayalji Desai, president of the Surat district Congress committee, and Khushalbhai Morarji Patel, who had taken part in the Mahatma's 1913 satyagraha in South Africa and was now secretary of the Swaraj Ashram in Bardoli, started by Gandhi in 1921-22. But Vallabhbhai was not sure of Bardoli's readiness. Preoccupied, in any case, with assisting flood victims, an effort in which British officials worked cheek-by-jowl with him, he gave his visitors the cold shoulder.

Two months later another deputation called on him. It included Mohanlal Pandya, who told Patel that he had moved about in the taluka and was certain that its people were "fully prepared". "You have to lead their fight," Pandya said to Vallabhbhai. The latter had only that morning heard that the Governor of Bombay had sanctioned a crore of rupees for flood relief. "In a triumphant mood" he narrated this success to Pandya and Khushalbhai, but Pandya's assessment had gone home, and gratification at the Raj's aid did not dull Patel's instinct for battle.

“You go back to Bardoli,” he told his callers. “If the peasants are prepared to withhold not merely the increase in the revenue but the whole of it, and if they are prepared to face all the dire consequences that are bound to ensue, I would be willing to come. Go everywhere in the taluka and find out what the people have to say and how many are ready.” But Vallabhbhai rejected Pandya’s suggestion for involving the GPCC; he didn’t want to lose the Raj’s grant.¹²⁴

Sixty villages were surveyed by four men, all Patidars: the Mehta brothers, Kunverji and Kalyanji, who had successfully advanced Bardoli’s claims in 1922, Khushalbhai Patel, and Keshavji Ganeshji. Their finding confirmed Pandya’s assessment. Accompanied by Pandya, Darbar Gopaldas and Ravishankar, the four Ks, as they were soon called, met Vallabhbhai at the end of January and gave him their report. Pandya, Gopaldas and Ravishankar told Patel that they would join Bardoli’s peasants in a satyagraha if he led it.

Vallabhbhai sent all seven to Gandhi, who examined them closely and asked whether the peasants would stand firm even if the activists and Vallabhbhai were arrested. “That is more than I can say,” answered Kalyanji. At this point Patel joined the discussion and Gandhi enquired, “But what does Vallabhbhai say?” “I have studied the case,” said Patel, “and I have no doubt that the cause is just.” “Well, then,” said the Mahatma, “there is nothing more to be considered. Victory to Gujarat!” Gandhi thus gave the green light even though Kalyanji was not sure of the peasants’ morale if leaders were arrested.¹²⁵

But Vallabhbhai would not jump in without testing the waters himself. On February 4 he went to Bardoli and cross-examined representatives from 79 villages at a closed-door meeting in the Ashram. “Are there four men here who are ready to risk their jaan and their maal?” he asked. Four peasants stood up and said they were. The private meeting was followed by a public conference of the taluka’s peasants. “The hour has struck,” Vallabhbhai told them. Then he asked them to take seven days to decide. From the conference he went to an adjacent village and asked two women how they would react if their husbands paid the revenue. “We will not allow them to enter our homes,” they replied. “And what if your buffaloes are taken away?” “We won’t mind,” was the answer.¹²⁶

That was his final probe. Not waiting for the week he had given the peasants to end, he sent a letter to the Governor about “the flagrant injustice” of the increase and asked for “an impartial tribunal” to go into the question. If a tribunal was not appointed, he “would have no alternative but to advise the people to refuse to pay the assessment and peacefully and quietly suffer the consequences.” “Should Your Excellency think it necessary,”

Vallabhbhai added, "that we should meet in the matter, I would gladly wait on you." A one-sentence reply from the Governor's private secretary informed Patel that his letter had "been transferred to the Revenue Department for official consideration and disposal",¹²⁷ and the Raj declared February 15 as the final date for paying the first instalment of the increased revenue.

On February 12 Vallabhbhai met the representatives of the villages again. As before, he held a private meeting first. The story of each village was related to him and pledges of refusal to pay were shown. "58 men have given their signatures in our village," said one peasant, "12 have not yet. But that does not matter." "All excepting the headman have signed the pledge," said a representative from another village, "but the headman is not hostile to us." "Our headman has already paid up," announced a delegate from a third village, "and a Vania from a neighbouring village also, but we never counted on them."¹²⁸ Piece by piece the scene became clear. Vallabhbhai made it plain that the decision was not his but theirs:

I still ask you to think twice before you take the plunge. Do not take comfort from the feeling that you have as your leader a fighter like myself. Forget me and forget my companions, fight if you feel that you must resist oppression and injustice. If you miserably fail, you will not rise again for several years, but if you succeed you will have done much to lay the foundations of Swaraj.

*You will move the resolution, and you will second it and support it. None of us will speak on it. It will be the expression of your own free will and choice.*¹²⁹

At the open meeting there was no reference to Swaraj. Clear in his mind that a win in Bardoli would assist Swaraj, Vallabhbhai was equally clear that the question in Bardoli was not Swaraj but a harsh impost, and he wasn't going to let friends or foes broaden the issue. However, he once again laid bare the consequences of defying a fiat of the Raj:

My letter, I am told, has been sent to the Revenue Department for consideration and disposal. When they will finish considering the letter we do not know. We cannot wait for their decision.

I would in all humility advise you to refuse payment of the whole assessment so long as the Government do not come to terms.

Do what you do with eyes open, with God as witness and fully counting the cost. It is possible that Government might pick up the leading men amongst you first to set an example. Government might first confiscate the lands of those who move the resolution

*today. If you are sure that these things will leave you unshaken, take up and fight the good fight.*¹³⁰

A peasant then moved a resolution advising everyone to refuse payment until the Government withdrew the increase or appointed an impartial tribunal. He was followed by a sequence of men, Patidar, Anavil Brahmin, Vania, Muslim and Parsi, who stood up one by one to announce their support of the resolution. No speeches were made; only a Hindu hymn was sung and a passage from the Koran read. "The resolution was passed in solemn silence."¹³¹

* * *

Half of the taluka's 87,000 inhabitants were Dublas and tribals; a third were Patidars; Muslims and Anavil Brahmins were 4 per cent each; and Vanias and untouchables 2 per cent each. But the Dublas, tribals and untouchables were a small minority among the 17,000 landholders. Patidars, Brahmins, Vanias, Muslims and a sprinkling of Parsis owned most of the land. In February only the Patidars seemed solid. About the others there were questions. Would the Vanias risk losing their large holdings? If they fell, could the Dublas and the tribals, the Vanias' debtors, possibly defy the Raj? Barring a few exceptions, the Brahmins were sitting on the fence. Muslims from Surat city were exercising pro-Government pressure on Bardoli's Muslims. As for the Parsis, some of them owned liquor shops and many of them had disliked the anti-drink programme of Vallabhbhai's associates. Would they join a fight against the Raj? An additional misgiving was ventilated by the once-confident Pandya, who was again reconnoitring the taluka:

*The atmosphere fills me with doubt and dismay.... No one seems to me to be in fighting trim.... The marriage season is in full swing.... Gaily dressed people are running about in their carts from village to village.... Are these the people you want to go to war against a mighty Government?*¹³²

Two hours after the February 12 resolution was passed, Vallabhbhai went to Vankaner village, a Patidar stronghold, and tackled the point Pandya had raised: "Have done with your wedding festivities as soon as possible. A people at war with a mighty Government cannot indulge in these pastimes." Then he coached the Vankaner peasants as a general might train his troops. First he taught them the tactic that four years earlier had foiled the Government's bid to attach valuables in Borsad: "Keep your doors closed and locked and take to the fields, only to return home

in the evening.” Next he taught strategy: “Make friends of even your bitterest enemies. Only that way can you present a united front.” Also, make “as many women to attend these meetings as men”, for “they might easily betray you” if they did not learn to “see their dear cattle seized before their very eyes” and “to put up with the repeated attention of attachment parties”. He laid down his rules: “The news from every village must reach Bardoli daily and punctually” – this was a warning to any peasants who intended to break ranks and pay up that the whole taluka would be told of their deeds – “and every instruction must be promptly obeyed.” Finally, he showed the peasants how to nullify the confiscation they feared:

*I know that some of you are afraid of your lands being confiscated....Will they take the lands away to England? The worst that can happen is that the lands might be transferred to Government in their books, but if you are united you can defy anyone to come forward to cultivate those lands. Government have at the most one headman and one talati to every village. [We have] every adult in the village.*¹³³

The organizing skills that Vallabhbhai had shown during the Borsad struggle were honed by his experience as municipal president and as the linchpin of flood relief. Bardoli saw these enhanced skills in action from February 12. Seasoned workers fanned out and opened camps in a dozen different villages. Gopaldas, Pandya and Ravishankar were among them, as were activists from Bardoli and a few from Kathiawad, including Balwantray Mehta, a future Chief Minister of Gujarat. Another volunteer was Dr Sumant Mehta, a former sanitary commissioner of Baroda. Mithubehn Petit, who belonged to one of Bombay's leading Parsi families, Darbar Gopaldas's wife Bhaktiba, Dr Sumant Mehta's wife Shardabehn and Vallabhbhai's daughter Manibehn were among the women who helped at the camps. Abbas Tyabji, now 73, turned up to encourage Bardoli's Muslims, as did Imam Saheb Abdul Kader Bavazir, who had stood with the Mahatma in South Africa and later with Gandhi and Vallabhbhai in Ahmedabad. The bulletins, or Patrikas, were placed in the care of Jugatram Dave, poet and writer, who through service had acquired “a knowledge of the whole taluka at his fingertips”.¹³⁴

The Patrikas carried news of the satyagraha and the text of Vallabhbhai's speeches. No one else gave talks – careless utterances would give the Raj an excuse to curb free speech. After a cyclostyled start, the Patrikas were printed in Surat and brought daily to Bardoli's villages. The print order went up along with the tempo until over 14,000 copies were being distributed, 10,000 in the taluka and four

thousand outside. A team from Kathiawad rendered songs that were easily learnt and repeated in fields and bazars across the taluka. Most helpers came unasked, but it was Vallabhbhai who had drawn them and who now directed them from Bardoli's Swaraj Ashram, where he was installed. One of Gandhi's sons, Ramdas, came to manage the Ashram refectory, where many of the helpers ate.

Vallabhbhai's efficiency was doubled by the sudden emergence, as if from nowhere, of the writer Swami Anand. After assisting the Mahatma and writing in *Navajivan* for some years, Swami, gifted and assiduous, had responded to a mystic call and left Gujarat, seemingly for good. But Bardoli recalled him, and Swami worked round the clock at Vallabhbhai's side, drafting his letters and statements and handling other chores. "I size up a man," Vallabhbhai told Swami, "before he has taken four steps from the door towards me."¹³⁵ There was pride in the claim but not much untruth.

A letter arrived on February 17 from J. W. Smyth, Revenue Secretary to the Government of Bombay:

*I am to state that Government are not prepared to suspend or reconsider the [revenue decision], or in fact to make further concessions of any kind. If in face of this declaration the people of Bardoli, either on their own initiative or yielding to the advice of persons from outside, default in payment,...the Governor-in-Council will have no hesitation in applying the [law].*¹³⁶

The "outsider" charge gave an opportunity that was too good to miss.

Patel to Smyth, 21-2-28: *You seem to regard me and my co-workers as "persons from outside". You have evidently missed the fact that the Government which you represent is truly dominated by "persons from outside". Let me assure you that though I claim to belong as much to Bardoli as to any other part of India, I have gone to Bardoli at the instance of its distressed inhabitants to whom it is open at any moment to dispense with my services. I wish it were equally easy and equally possible for them to dispense with a rule imposed from without by force of arms....*¹³⁷

The Raj made matters plain. Peasants not paying revenue within ten days of receiving a written notice would pay chothai, the 25 per cent fine. If they persisted in withholding the tax, their movables and buffaloes would be attached, or they would forfeit their lands. The Raj's written notice first went to about 110 Vantias, vulnerable

because of their large holdings. But Vallabhbhai's "notice", the satyagraha pledge, was also presented to the Vanias. It was a difficult choice, but a majority signed the satyagraha pledge.

Since the Raj needed loyalty more than money, the Deputy Collector invited a wealthy and elderly Vania to his house and asked "for just a part of your dues" – "even a rupee, for my sake". The old man replied: "I have great regard for you, but I also have to live in this village. The village has decided that no one must pay, and I am helpless."¹³⁸ Soft words didn't exhaust the Raj's repertoire. In Bedkuva village, the talati forced an untouchable landholder to pay up by beating him. Desperate to cite at least one paying villager, the talati of another village paid out of his own pocket on behalf of a washerman who owned a miserable patch of land, and hoped that his clothes would be washed free in recompense.

Some landholders resorted to trickery. Acting in collusion with a revenue officer, two Vanias "accidentally" left their dues near their windows and "neglected" to shut the windows when a drumbeat announced the arrival of an attaching party. The Raj was able, therefore, to "seize" Rs. 1,500 from one of them and Rs. 785 from the other. The villagers saw through the stratagem and were furious. Rejecting Vallabhbhai's advice they extracted "penance" from the two Vanias: one paid Rs. 800 towards the satyagraha campaign and the other Rs. 651.

But there was no disgrace in what seven Vanias of Valod did. Told that their lands would be forfeited if they didn't pay up by April 12, they assured Vallabhbhai that they would hold fast, and one of them asked the Mahalkari* who had sent the notice "to resign from your service rather than carry out the work of attaching land". At a meeting convened to congratulate the Valod Vanias, Vallabhbhai pointed out that "today the Mahalkari is merely an official who is entitled to sit in his office. His fiat runs no further. If things continue like this, he will find it difficult to get a chaprasi to help him."¹³⁹ April 12 came and went, and the *Times of India* complained that "the satyagraha movement shows no sign of abatement".¹⁴⁰

"Master of the peasants' patois and peasants' idiom, Vallabhbhai simply swept them off their feet."¹⁴¹ This was Mahadev's verdict at the time. It was repeated fifty-nine years later by five survivors of the 1928 battle: Khushalbhai Patel and Uttamchand Shah of Bardoli, Vallabhbhai K. Patel of Sankri, Chhotubhai Desai of Puni and Makanji P. Patel of Bajipura. "He held everyone in his spell," said Khushalbhai. "People felt their day was incomplete if they hadn't heard the Sardar or read his speech in the Patrika."¹⁴² He charmed

* administrative head of the mahal, or part of the taluka

the peasants even when he shamed them: "I go about in your villages at dead of night. Not once has anyone said to me, 'Halt! Who goes there?' Ravishankar tells me with surprise that in these villages not a dog barks and not a buffalo flourishes its horns at a stranger! Your docility has been your undoing."¹⁴³

He ridiculed the Raj and charmed the peasants: "Listen to these bellows. (*Seized buffaloes confined in the police station were bellowing.*) Reporters, write it down and report that in the police station of Valod the buffaloes make speeches."¹⁴⁴ He said his veins had peasants' blood and they were charmed. And he moved them when he spoke of a peasant's life: "He may have only a portion of an acre, he maintains on its yield a bullock or a buffalo, works incredibly hard, messes about in manure and dust, plants seedlings in knee-deep water, ignores risks from poisonous scorpions."¹⁴⁵ Bullock, buffalo, camel, dog – one animal after another tumbled out of Vallabhbhai's mouth:

*Government has run amuck. It thinks it can trample everything under its feet. Even so thinks the mad elephant, priding itself on having trampled even lions and tigers to death, and scorning the little gnat defying him. I am teaching the little gnat today to let the elephant go on in his mad career and then get into his trunk at the opportune moment.*¹⁴⁶

Read in print, his message to Bardoli's peasants seems in places too sweeping or too simple. "Where," he asked on one occasion, "is there another so honest as a peasant, so free from bad habits and vices, so guileless, so Godfearing, living by the sweat of his brow?" At another time he said, "If a peasant betrays his pledge, the earth will cease to have its showers of rain."¹⁴⁷ Yet his remarks were meant not for scrutinizers of the written word but for the ears of peasants, who responded to what he said, just as they did to "the burning fire" in his eyes and "the masculine vigour of his tone".¹⁴⁸ Mahadev has sketched the Vallabhbhai of Bardoli: he is "ever on the move, without haste and without rest, his iron discipline ever unrelaxed, paying the penalty of his exclusive prerogative, speechmaking, often at midnight and often at three or four places in a day."¹⁴⁹

The Raj too had its orators, some of them derisive. F. G. H. Anderson, the father of the revenue enhancement, addressed the peasants and their allies from the floor of the Bombay Legislative Council:

There will be plenty of people coming forward...to take up good property when it is going. I beseech them therefore to think twice

*lest in marching to what they are pleased to call their Thermopylae, they do not by mistake find themselves at Panipat.*¹⁵⁰

It was during April 1928 that someone, no one knows who, first referred to Vallabhbhai as the peasants' Sardar. The appellation, as short as it was apt, at once caught on. "Did you hear Sardar?", "I must inform Sardar", "Sardar really gave it to them!" – thus was "Sardar" Patel born. But if peasants suddenly saw him as their chief, writers unexpectedly found him a guide. "Never before had I heard such brilliance in his language," said Mahadev. "It is from the speeches of Vallabhbhai in Bardoli that the lovers of Gujarati discovered how rich their language was," said Narhari.¹⁵¹

And his heart, that well-guarded sanctum, revealed itself. He "seemed to suffer physical pain"¹⁵² on hearing that the Raj had seized some peasant's land, and acted at once if someone on his team was ill or injured. Chhotubhai Desai of Puni village, 29 at the time, recalled in 1987: "I was attached to the Sarbhon camp and used to walk without ceasing from village to village. One day I noticed a strange swelling in my leg and found I couldn't stand or even sit. Word reached Sardar, who arranged for me to be taken at once to Bombay, where Manilal Kothari had been alerted by him. I was admitted to Harkissondas Hospital and told afterwards that if I had arrived half an hour later it might have been too late."¹⁵³

Before long Vallabhbhai had set up at least 16 camps with over 250 "officers" and "privates" stationed in them. Their day frequently began at 3 a.m. and ended only when tired limbs were laid to rest on a thin palm-leaf mat for a short night. They handed out the Patrikas, warned villagers when an attacking party arrived, firmed up waverers, carried messages between camp and headquarters, drew water from a well and did every lowly job. Vallabhbhai K. Patel of Sankri village recalled, in 1987, the Sardar's words to Makanji Patel of Bajipura village regarding a Bajipura resident who was wavering: "Your head will be severed if Virchand pays."¹⁵⁴ The idiom, pure Patidar, didn't hurt the non-violent satyagraha.

* * *

"Long live the Sardar to fight many a good fight," said Gandhi, adopting the peasants' appellation, in a letter. "The battle in Bardoli is going on very well," the Mahatma added.¹⁵⁵ The two had agreed that Gandhi would stay out of Bardoli; his presence would have enlarged the conflict into one for Swaraj, and for that Gandhi and Patel were not ready. Moreover, both knew, in the words of Mahadev, that Vallabhbhai, "who had in him the blood of generations of peasants", could organize the Bardoli populace "in a form in which (Gandhi)

could never have done".¹⁵⁶ Unlike the Mahatma he spoke the language of the soil and as a Patidar he belonged to the community that comprised the satyagraha's backbone. Also, he permitted some practices that Gandhi would not have.

If his satyagraha was therefore less pure, it was also more practical. When Gandhi heard that peasants in some villages were boycotting defectors, he declared in *Navajivan* that all forms of boycott were not legitimate. "To refuse to render service to the boycotted person when he is ill, to prevent a doctor from attending to him, to refrain from assisting him in the event of death in funeral ceremonies, to deprive him of the use of a well or a temple, these are all forms of violent boycott."¹⁵⁷ Vallabhbhai did not favour all forms of boycott either – we saw that he was against the extortion of "penance" money – but the line he drew was more permissive. The thrust of Gandhi's *Navajivan* article was that wrong forms of boycott would eventually hurt the movement, but he took care not to question any of Vallabhbhai's utterances or actions; that would have injured the authority of the Sardar of Bardoli. His advice was couched in broad terms, and the execution was solely in Vallabhbhai's hands.

Vallabhbhai gained a significant point when the Raj reverted 22 of the 32 "upgraded" villages to their original category. They still faced a 22 per cent increase, but no longer on a higher base. The cohesion that had extracted this concession was in evidence when Hartshorn, the district's Collector, visited Bardoli at the end of April. He found no shops open and no taxidriver willing to be hired. The licences of two taxidrivers were revoked then and there, but the Collector had to walk to Sarbhon. Youngsters on drum-duty alerted residents to the Collector's arrival and all doors were closed. The village headman informed Hartshorn that neither he nor others in the village were going to pay.

The Raj reacted by replacing the Mamlatdar, appointing three special officers for confiscations and bringing 40 untutored Pathans from Bombay to assist the officers. The Pathans were more willing than local talatis to seize buffaloes and valuables, but their big build, tough looks and strange ways were resented as much as the seizures. One Pathan was caught stealing, another attacked a satyagrahi, a third was accused of indecent exposure. A Hindu-Muslim dispute might have resulted had Vallabhbhai not ensured that only Muslim residents filed complaints against the Pathans' behaviour. Shaukat Ali helped by arriving in Bardoli at the end of May and denouncing the "use of Pathans to overcome the villagers".¹⁵⁸ Yielding to the pressure of opinion, the Raj withdrew the Pathans, but not before they had discredited the Government they served.

Buffaloes were seized even when they belonged to a tailor or a washerman who had no land and owed no revenue. In some cases

captured animals died of thirst or hunger. To avoid seizure, some moved their cattle to adjoining Baroda-territory villages and the rest brought their animals indoors, where they lost weight and colour. Aware that the peasants "loved their animals as dearly as their children",¹⁵⁹ Vallabhbhai supplied them an ancient remedy, laughter, calling the pale, shut-in buffaloes "memsahibs" or "madames", and giving the title "Buffalo Tiger" to a zealous official who chased buffaloes, not always successfully, under the hot sun.

The Raj too was seeking remedies. It asked Smart, the Northern Division Commissioner, to quit the seaside where he was vacationing and base himself at Surat. It declared that anyone asking drivers of taxis, bullock-carts and horse-carts not to carry officials would face imprisonment. Beating a drum near a public road or square was also made an offence. Ravishankar Maharaj was sentenced for five months and ten days rigorous for telling a bullock-cart owner that a policeman couldn't commandeer his services. Vallabhbhai uttered a defiant reaction:

*The Government perhaps thought that by arresting Ravishankar Maharaj, who has been responsible for reforming thousands of Baraiyas,...they would be clipping my wings, but...let me assure them that my wings will grow afresh, as luxuriantly as grass grows in the rainy season.*¹⁶⁰

Next, 19 villagers of Vankaner, where Vallabhbhai had made his first speech after the February 12 resolution, were arrested for obstructing three bullock-carts carrying the deputy collector's luggage. For want of identification or evidence 8 were let off, but 11 were sentenced for six months rigorous plus one month simple. Provocation and May's intense heat formed a dangerous mixture, but Vallabhbhai was determined not to give the Raj any excuse for employing more force. "You," he told the people, "are the hammer", and the Government an "angry, red-hot metal". If the hammer stayed cool, it would "mould the iron to the shape you desire". He added: "At the moment I would ignore any abuse heaped upon me, and you too should put up with abuses.... Even if they take away the thing most dear to you, keep quiet."¹⁶¹ He was obeyed, as he had been when he forbade the purchase of attached goods. Apart from a handful of instances, no seized buffalo, cart, table or hichko was bought by residents of the taluka. Outsiders coming to buy forfeited lands were plainly told that no one would work on them: they were welcome to "have lands for the fun of it".¹⁶²

Vanias, Muslims, Parsis and tribals joined the Patidars; the widespread but scattered dislike of the tax was assembled by Vallabhbhai into a wall of opposition. The smallest questions went

to him. Was it right for the Manekpur barber to cut the hair of a Parsi in the village who had paid up? Yes, ruled the Sardar. Another Parsi, Dorabji of Valod, owning land as well as a licensed liquor shop, had joined the satyagrahis but unlike the others he could not shut his shop to avoid attachment; his licence required him to keep it open. To recover Rs 243 from Dorabji, liquor worth Rs 2,000 was seized from his shop and sold to another Parsi canteen keeper of Valod for Rs 98-and-odd, one of those rare instances of a taluka resident buying seized goods. Thereafter land worth Rs. 30,000 was attached for recovering the remaining Rs 144 and a few annas! But Dorabji and his mother-in-law Navajbai, joint owners of the liquor shop, stood firm.

Vanias saw their lands confiscated and some of their sons arrested for obstruction but did not yield. Neither did the tribals, who showed the courage that at other times enabled them, in Vallabhbhai's words, to climb "the toddy and palm trees, shooting straight up to the sky without a branch or a stump to afford a foothold".¹⁶³ The exertions of Abbas Tyabji and Imamsaheb had induced many Muslims to sign the satyagraha pledge. A fatwa against the purchase of seized property issued by some Maulanas confirmed the Muslims in their resolve, and they too showed a willingness to suffer. Ibrahim Patel of Bardoli, for instance, was "absolutely unmoved" when "thousands of rupees worth of his land was declared forfeited".¹⁶⁴

Most striking, however, was the spirit of Bardoli's women. Vallabhbhai had sought their support, we saw, at that first meeting in February in Vankaner. Offering it without reserve, the women soon began to outnumber men at Vallabhbhai's meetings. K. M. Munshi, who resigned from the Bombay Legislative Council in June in protest against the Raj's attitude, observed the women giving Vallabhbhai "spontaneous homage" and "placing on his forehead the auspicious mark of victory, laying at his feet their hard-earned rupee or two, and singing in their rustic accents songs of 'the misdeeds of the hapless Government'".¹⁶⁵ Mahadev records two other vignettes. Armed policemen, a circle inspector and two Pathans had positioned themselves next to the house of a 75-year-old pensioner. They were ready to pounce upon any door that opened and grab any property they could reach. Informed of this siege, Vallabhbhai walked up to the house. The old man's wife, a mala in her hands, was at an upper storey window.

"I hope you are not afraid, old mother," said Vallabhbhai from the street. "Why should I be afraid when you are here to protect us?" the lady answered. "Not I but Rama," corrected Vallabhbhai. "Indeed,

*Ramji is merciful," agreed the old woman. "But how do you like these Pathans and policemen at your doors?" asked one of Vallabhbhai's companions. "They are quite welcome," the old woman answered. "But for them the Sardar would not have graced my house."*¹⁶⁶

Bhawanbhai Hirabhai Patel of the village of Nani Farod was charged with the offence of banging his door on an attaching officer and injuring him. Actually it was his wife who had shut the door; Bhawanbhai was not even in the house at the time. Yet the police chose to punish him rather than his wife. Before the trial she brought him to Swaraj Ashram. Addressing her husband in Vallabhbhai's presence, she said:

Look now, no faltering timid word before the magistrate! Ask him to give as severe a sentence as he desires. Do not think of me and the little ones. Be of good cheer and answer all questions in firm and manly accents.

Then she turned to the Sardar:

What a pity they did not prosecute me! What is there in going to jail? Grinding one maund (forty kilos) of corn flour is nothing. I would have done a maund and a half.

After this the two went to the court. As soon as a six-month sentence was announced, she said to her husband:

Go bravely to jail. Such an opportunity does not come easily. Do not worry about me or the little ones. May God give you strength and courage.

After giving him a send-off she was back at Swaraj Ashram, where she laid at Vallabhbhai's feet the nine rupees that her husband's friends had given.¹⁶⁷

* * *

The boiling heat of Gujarat in May can impair anyone's judgment. Commissioner Wilfred Smart spoke that month of "the swarm of agitators" from Kheda "living on the poor cultivators" of Bardoli. He didn't say in so many words that Vallabhbhai and another son of Kheda, Abbas Tyabji, who had been Chief Justice of Baroda, belonged to the swarm, but that was the natural inference. There was a fierce outcry and "Bardoli" entered conversation all across India. The Mahatma demanded a public apology, and Vithalbhai

sent Gandhi Rs 1,000 for sufferers in Bardoli. Promising the Mahatma that he would be giving that sum each month until the struggle ended, Vithalbhai also hinted at resigning his Speaker's chair. Members of the Bombay Legislative Council bestirred themselves and asked the Governor to appoint the tribunal that the peasants had been demanding. When the Governor turned down their request, nine members resigned. Congress's WorCom, on its part, "thanked Vallabhbhai Patel" for standing by the peasants, assailed the Commissioner's "offensive remarks" and urged "the country to assist the satyagrahis in every way".¹⁶⁸

While welcoming support, Vallabhbhai and the Mahatma didn't want the character of the struggle to change. Gandhi stopped C.R. from visiting Bardoli and Vallabhbhai gave no encouragement to WorCom members who wanted to join the action or at least witness it. He himself wished to be at the side of Gandhi, who had been weakened by the unexpected death of the mainstay of Sabarmati Ashram, his nephew Maganlal, but that was impossible. "You cannot leave Bardoli," the Mahatma wrote to Vallabhbhai.¹⁶⁹ All could not be kept out of Bardoli. They came from far and near, some to scoff, some to serve, the rest to watch. All left marvelling at Vallabhbhai's leadership and the peasants' fortitude.¹⁷⁰

"The agriculturists are once again warned that land once taken will never again be returned," the Raj declared on May 31. Addressing the landholders of Bardoli, the Government added that "1,400 acres of land has been disposed of in this way and another 5,000 acres will be disposed of similarly." Vallabhbhai answered the grim threat by affirming that the peasants would exist even without their land: "How much land does a man require? Six feet at the most, and the Hindus not even that, except for a couple of hours, after which they make room for others."¹⁷¹

Yet he also insisted that the Raj would not be able to carry out its threat, and made a memorable promise to the peasants: "Your land will come back to you knocking at your door."¹⁷² He also took some practical steps. Manibehn, Mithubehn Petit and Bhaktiba Desai were instructed by him to park themselves in huts on some of the lands that outsiders had "bought". No Bardoli-ite being prepared to buy them, they had been sold for a song. Vallabhbhai asked the "kerosene merchant from Bharuch" who had obtained a large plot in this fashion "to give thought to the retribution which will be meted out to him by God in this life",¹⁷³ and had a warning for others as well:

The so-called Parsi purchasers should understand that they would have to riddle with bullets the bodies of their own Parsi sisters and brothers and manure their fields with their bones before ploughing

*a single furrow. The Muslims and Hindus, if any, must reckon with the same fate.*¹⁷⁴

It looked as if Vallabhbhai could not remain free. While Motilal Nehru wondered what premium would be charged for insuring Vallabhbhai against arrest, Gandhi wrote to Vallabhbhai in a more serious vein:

*Herewith draft of the letter to be sent to the Governor.... Write or wire if I am wanted. There are persistent rumours of your impending arrest. The arrest, if it comes off, will be a rest cure. If it does not, rest is for us forbidden fruit.*¹⁷⁶

But Vallabhbhai was unperturbed. He did not want Gandhi in Bardoli yet, and said to colleagues in Bardoli:

*Why should I be arrested? There is hardly any chance. The poor buffalo at least fetches a few rupees. I would fetch nothing if attached and sold.*¹⁷⁷

He had been seen and heard in every single village in the taluka. The spirit he instilled is conveyed by a conversation between Mahadev and a peasant that took place immediately after the May 31 threat:

Mahadev: *You must have heard of the latest communique. Peasant: Yes. It only means that the struggle will be more bitter. M.: How long can you hold out? P.: Indefinitely.... There is not a single buffalo left in my village.... I have discarded brass vessels. We cook in earthen vessels, eat in earthen plates.... The buffaloes have gone, no milk is available, and many of us have given up the tea habit.*¹⁷⁸

"I am not going to leave Bardoli," Vallabhbhai announced in June to friends at Swaraj Ashram.¹⁷⁹ And he made a request. Could he have a small house in the Ashram compound? It was agreed to build one for him. The house would take a year to rise, but Vallabhbhai's decision to tie his future to Bardoli was a timely boost to the peasants' morale. A delighted Gandhi said to Mahadev, who was shuttling between Bardoli and Ahmedabad: "Now the people will never be beaten."¹⁸⁰ Material support too was beginning to reach the peasants. It could never come near what they had lost, but every rupee helped. By the end of June two lakh rupees had been given to a Satyagraha Fund that Gandhi had opened, and Rs 24,000 were presented to Vallabhbhai at a meeting in early July in Bombay's Empire theatre, where he was honoured by the youth of the metropolis, some of whom

had assisted in Bardoli. Other admirers lent four cars for his "army's" use.

* * *

A pointer to the eventual outcome of the battle was the resignation in early June of 63 village headmen and 11 talatis of Bardoli taluka. Vallabhbhai's tongue hadn't spared the talati and the headman: he called them the Raj's "pair of bullocks, whipped, abused and from time to time sugared".¹⁸¹ But they did the Raj's work. The crossing over of so many of them showed that the threat of May 31 had failed. On June 17 K. M. Munshi resigned his legislature seat and gave his report to the Governor: "In the villages which I visited, not a man or woman was either sorry for the step taken or shaken in his or her faith."¹⁸²

Offended by the May 31 threat and emboldened by the support he was receiving despite it, Vallabhbhai considered widening the battleground, and he certainly raised his pitch. He went to rallies in Nadiad, Bharuch and Ahmedabad and uttered strong words. "Keep quiet and watch with sympathetic interest," he said at Nadiad. "I shall give you the signal when your turn comes." And at Bharuch: "If Government mean to devour the land, I warn them betimes that the conflagration will spread over all of Gujarat. They will realise not a farthing in Gujarat next year."¹⁸³

The first limb of the establishment to concede Vallabhbhai's ascendancy in the conflict was the *Times of India*. After touring the taluka, its special correspondent described Vallabhbhai as a "Lenin" who had "instituted a Bolshevik regime" in Bardoli, and held him responsible for the suffering of the peasants "herded in their miserable windowless dwellings" and their cattle with "festerings sores all over their bodies". All the same, the correspondent's reports suggested that the Raj's writ no longer ran in the taluka but Vallabhbhai's did. The correspondent referred also to "the iron discipline prevailing in Bardoli", the devotion of the women to Vallabhbhai, and the resignation of, by now, 80 headmen and 19 talatis. "The subordinate officers... are at the mercy of the satyagraha commander," he added.¹⁸⁴ One consequence of his reports was a discussion on Bardoli in another of the Raj's limbs, the distant yet influential House of Commons. "It is true," admitted Lord Winterton, a member of His Majesty's Government, "that Vallabhbhai Patel has met with a measure of success."¹⁸⁵

While Michael O'Dwyer, ex-Governor of Punjab, asked in London for "a prompt enforcement of the law of conspiracy",¹⁸⁶ the Governor of Bombay, Sir Leslie Wilson, announced that he was going to Simla for consultations with Lord Irwin, the Viceroy. Was the Raj going to

harden or soften? "It is not clear on which side of the road the camel will squat," Vallabhbhai said in a letter to Mahadev. He had heard that a group of officials demanding his imprisonment were overruled because of the stand of Dan Healey, the ex-chief of Ahmedabad police who had effected Gandhi's arrest in 1922 and who knew Vallabhbhai well. Now the presidency's special police superintendent, Healey had evidently said: "You can be sure that there will be no storm in Bardoli while Vallabhbhai sits there, and there is no point wasting money on extra police."¹⁸⁷ Healey's views on security in Bardoli were not heeded. A number of fresh armed policemen were seen in the taluka, and there were rumours of a "military occupation".¹⁸⁸

At the same time, Vallabhbhai was informed by Commissioner Smart that His Excellency the Governor was willing to receive him in Surat. On July 18 the panoplied Governor descended to the border of Bardoli taluka for a meeting with the chief of a "swarm of agitators". It wasn't a favour. The Raj had been compelled. To the notable engagement Vallabhbhai took Abbas Tyabji, Kalyanji Mehta and, unexpectedly but fittingly, three women: Shardabehn Mehta, Bhaktiba Desai and Mithubehn Petit. After a more or less formal meeting between the delegations, Leslie Wilson and a self-possessed Vallabhbhai met one to one. "Lord Irwin, too, is anxious to end the unfortunate situation," said Wilson. When they discussed terms, agreement seemed both near and far. Then, on July 23, Wilson made a public announcement in which he spoke of the Government's resolve to ensure that no "portion of His Majesty's dominions" successfully defied "the writ of His Majesty the King Emperor"; but he also expressed willingness to discuss "the justice or injustice of the reassessment".¹⁸⁹

What were the camel's intentions? "The next two weeks are a very critical period," Gandhi said in a letter to Vallabhbhai, "during which no such word should be uttered on our side as is likely to impede a settlement."¹⁹⁰ Vallabhbhai followed the advice and sought the Mahatma's and Mahadev's help in drafting his reply to the Governor's statement.¹⁹¹ While referring to "the threats contained in the Governor's deliverance", Vallabhbhai agreed with the Governor that "the only question is that of the justice or injustice of the assessment".¹⁹² Moving as one, Vallabhbhai and Gandhi rejected a proposal by Sardul Singh Caveeshar, one of Punjab's leading Congressmen, for "sympathetic satyagraha throughtout the country". "Not yet," was their simple answer.¹⁹³ They thought the camel would come down on the side of peace. However, not taking any chances, Gandhi decided that he should be in Bardoli, ready to take Vallabhbhai's place if the Sardar was arrested. Peasants in large numbers greeted the Mahatma as he entered the taluka on August 2. Gandhi told them:

*Vallabhbhai has made you famous throughout India....I cannot speak [without] the order of the Sardar. I admit I am Vallabhbhai's elder brother, but in public life no matter whether one is the father or older brother of the man under whom one serves, one must obey his instructions.*¹⁹⁴

The Mahatma was not wrong in readying himself for an escalation. On August 3 the Government of Bombay sent the following confidential telegram to New Delhi:

*Arrangements have been made to take action under the Criminal Law Amendment Act, as well as for utilisation of all coercive provisions of the Land Revenue Code.... It would be desirable to have troops in readiness in Surat to be used only in case of urgent necessity.*¹⁹⁵

The Vallabhbhai-Wilson meeting in Surat and exertions of intermediaries, of whom K. M. Munshi was one, had revealed that while the Raj was prepared to reopen the assessment, release prisoners, reinstate the talatis and headmen who had resigned and return lands that were seized but not yet sold, it was unwilling to arrange the restoration of lands that had been sold. Also, it would take the other steps only if the difference between the taluka's old and new assessment was first deposited with the Raj's treasury – the sum would be returned if the increase was withdrawn. Vallabhbhai replied that he was not interested in a settlement which did not return all confiscated lands to their original owners, and he rejected the deposit demand.

In the end the camel opted for peace. The obstacles to a settlement were removed on August 6 following long talks in Poona between Vallabhbhai and Sir Chunilal Mehta, Finance Member of the Bombay Government, who negotiated on behalf of the Governor. Annuling its May 31 threat, the Raj agreed that sold lands would be bought back and returned, and a display of ingenuity by Vithalbhai solved the deposit problem. He induced a friend and associate of his called Ramchandra Bhatt, a Bombay businessman hailing from Mota village in Bardoli taluka, to offer to deposit the difference. Unaware of Vithalbhai's role, Vallabhbhai at first dismissed the solution, but Mahadev, who had accompanied him to Poona, argued that condoning Bhatt's offer was different from submitting to a demand of the Raj; it wasn't as if either Vallabhbhai or the peasants had agreed to deposit the sum.

"But look here," returned Vallabhbhai, "I frankly do not see this game.... What do you think Bapu would say?" Then, turning to Swami Anand, who too was in Poona with him, Vallabhbhai asked, "What

do you say, Swami?" What Swami replied has not been recorded, but Vallabhbhai laid aside his aversion of the deposit.¹⁹⁶ Mahadev later wrote:

*Never was the Sardar higher in my estimation than that day. His anxiety to have the opinion of... companions like Swami and myself seemed to be as great as his anxiety to find out what Bapu would think of his attitude.*¹⁹⁷

The agreement was carried out with dispatch. Prisoners were at once let off, talatis and headmen were reinstated, and orders to restore forfeited lands were issued. Acknowledging the steps, Vallabhbhai instructed: "The peasants should unfailingly commence payment of the old assessment."¹⁹⁸ Collector Hartshorn, who had often asserted that sold lands would never be restored, was quietly replaced by Joseph Garrett, the official who had wanted Vallabhbhai's inclusion in the honours list. The purchasers of forfeited lands, who were few and far between, were ferreted out, but it was only because of the combined pressure of the Raj and the peasants that they parted with their cheap-gotten wealth. Broomfield, the judge who had tried Gandhi, and Maxwell, the Kheda Collector whom Vallabhbhai had assisted during the flood, were named to the inquiry committee that re-examined the revenue. Vallabhbhai had tried to have his Middle Temple friend, Godfrey Davis, appointed instead of Broomfield, but even without Davis the committee was free of any bias in favour of the new assessment. Maxwell, in fact, had opposed the recommendation of Anderson on which it was based.

In a private reappraisal, Leslie Wilson, the Governor, admitted that "the Government has no effective weapon for dealing with satyagraha". However, he held the Collector of Surat responsible for the Raj's defeat. In a letter to the Viceroy dated August 16, Wilson said, "I cannot blame the Collector of Surat sufficiently for not taking immediate action and informing the Government of the true state of affairs at an earlier date."¹⁹⁹

* * *

The Vallabhbhai of April had become the Sardar in June and a triumphant general in August. His soldiers, the peasants, had not given in. They had not hit back. And the Raj had yielded. In four months of hard battle, not a single life had been lost. C.R. spoke of Vallabhbhai's "great part in Indian history",²⁰⁰ Subhas Bose referred to his "glorious victory",²⁰¹ and there was a torrent of congratulatory messages. Recalling Vallabhbhai's role during the flood, Sarojini Naidu noted that Patel had manifested "an amazing power of

organisation...twice within one year" and translated Gandhi's "teachings into practical, dynamic action". The poetess added that Vallabhbhai's "labours and leadership have passed into the songs that women sing in their cottages".²⁰² But he didn't hug the praise or store it in his mind. The tributes swayed him about as much as the Raj's threats had.

There were victory celebrations in Bardoli, in Surat, in Ahmedabad....Gandhi insisted on attending some of them. At one meeting he even presented a *maanpatra* to Vallabhbhai, and the Sardar, the general who would soon be 53, was acutely embarrassed. Four distinct notes are discernible in his utterances on these occasions. Firstly, he disclaimed personal merit. Secondly, he gave credit to others. Thirdly, he refused to accept that he was Gandhi's "chief disciple" or a complete adherent of non-violence. Finally, he sought to reduce the activists' dependence on the Mahatma. Below are some of his words in the wake of the August 1928 triumph:

I do not deserve the honour which you are giving me because of Bardoli. I am merely the instrument administer[ing] a miracle medicine to the patient, the Indian peasant....If anyone deserves honour, it is the giver of that medicine.

Some honour is also due to the patient, for without the self-control that he exercised, the medicine could not have worked. If anyone else deserves to be honoured, it is my colleagues who showed astonishing discipline, and who had complete confidence in me.

The citizens of Ahmedabad have described me as the chief disciple of Gandhiji. I only wish I deserved that description. I know however that I am not worthy of it.

You have all heard of the Bhil disciple of Dronacharya in Mahabharata. He never had the good fortune of learning directly under Dronacharya....In my case, I have access to the Guru whose disciple you say I am. So far from being his chief disciple, I doubt if I am fit even to rank among his many disciples. If I had that fitness, I would have accomplished today what you hope I shall accomplish in the future.

I am confident that there exist today many disciples of his who have never seen him but who have completely mastered his teachings.... Those who do not adhere to [non-violence] to the full extent are being publicized now....

People often say, what will happen when Gandhiji has gone? I have no fear on that account.... He has given us whatever he had to give, and it is up to us to do our duty.²⁰³

A young man – the future poet and novelist, Umashankar Joshi – recorded the look and message of Vallabhbhai's face as seen in the

victory procession in Ahmedabad: "A quiet healthy appearance, a grey-black drooping moustache, a small supply of grey-black hair on the head, a slight redness in the eye, a little hardness in the moustache and the face as a whole, an impatience that wouldn't be encountered on a search in ten villages, a natural consciousness of power but not a consciousness of personal victory."²⁰⁴ Controlled power and unfulfilled aspirations made a formidable mix.

Broomfield and Maxwell vindicated Vallabhbhai. Their six-month examination of records, peasants and officials revealed errors in the Raj's computations, and they held that an increase of only seven, and not 22, per cent could be warranted. Accepting the verdict, which came in May 1929, the Raj annulled the increase that it had been unable to enforce.

An emboldened Vallabhbhai sought and scored wider gains. Pointing out that the mistakes disclosed by the Broomfield-Maxwell report were not confined to Bardoli taluka, he warned of a "general conflagration over the whole presidency".²⁰⁵ One of his demands was that the legislature and not officials should have the power to fix revenue. In June he went to the Khandesh region to see if it was ready for satyagraha; and in July, declaring a wish "to combine Maharashtra and Gujarat in a mighty battle against the Government's land revenue policy", he launched the Bombay Presidency Land League.²⁰⁶ The Raj again yielded. The Bombay Government declared that there would be no increase in revenue until the Simon Commission made its proposals for constitutional reforms. This implied that control over revenue was likely to pass to the legislature. In any case, plans to revise revenue in Kheda district and elsewhere in the presidency were abandoned, and F. G. H. Anderson had reason to rue his remark about Thermopylae and Panipat.

* * *

Vallabhbhai's name occurred to many when they thought of a new Congress President. True, he and even his GPCC had stayed clear of Congress at the national level ever since Gandhi yielded control to the Swarajists. The all-India Congress had played no role in Bardoli and neither had the GPCC. Vallabhbhai had commanded the peasants not as the GPCC chief but as an individual in whom the peasants had faith. Yet it became clear as 1928 progressed that Congress was slowly returning to the character it possessed in the early twenties. Bardoli had restored Indians' confidence in their ability to fight. "Bardolizing India" spread both as an expression and as an aspiration, and Vallabhbhai appeared a natural choice for presiding at Congress's end-December session in Calcutta. Some provincial Congress committees formally proposed his name, but Motilal Nehru had

suggested it a few weeks before the Bardoli victory. Writing to the Mahatma on July 11, 1928 he had said:

*I am quite clear that the hero of the hour is Vallabhbhai, and the least we can do is to offer him the crown. Failing him, I think that under all the circumstances Jawahar would be the best choice.*²⁰⁷

There was more than a father's fondness in Motilal's espousal of Jawaharlal's name. Young, light-skinned and of handsome appearance, possessing verve and a fine mind, hard-working, able to outline an appealing and radical vision with elegance and feeling, Jawaharlal was becoming a leader of the younger generation. At the Madras Congress of December 1927 he had moved a resolution in favour of "complete national independence" and won the admiration of youth. Telling Jawaharlal that he was going too fast, Gandhi had tried to restrain him; in the Mahatma's view, Congress's first need was to learn, or relearn, how to fight, not to rephrase its goal. Yet Jawaharlal's growing popularity was a fact, as was that of Subhas Bose. Younger than Jawaharlal by six years, Bose was not in the running for Congress's throne in 1928, but he matched Jawaharlal's appeal, possessing dash, eloquence, industriousness, an arresting appearance and a radical image. Subhas had joined Jawaharlal in advocating "complete independence" and rejecting Dominion status. Their differences lay in Jawaharlal's greater internationalism and Subhas's greater keenness on action.

Gandhi resolved the question posed in Motilal's letter by asking Motilal to preside himself. If Vallabhbhai was the hero of 1928, and Jawaharlal and Subhas were attracting the youth, Motilal had earned acclaim for his attempt to draft a constitution for India acceptable to all parties and communities. We saw earlier that the Madras Congress had appointed a committee headed by Motilal to prepare such a constitution, an Indian alternative to the insipid recommendations expected from the Simon Commission. By August Motilal's draft – the Nehru Report, as it was called – was ready. Most parties declared their agreement with it, but the Muslim League dissented on the communal question, and Jawaharlal, Subhas Bose and their supporters in Congress opposed its acceptance of Dominion status.

Vallabhbhai took the Mahatma's choice of Motilal as he had taken the adulation over Bardoli: refusing to dwell on it, he turned to the next thing. He and the Mahatma went to the Calcutta Congress. Worried by the opposition to his Report, Motilal had sought Gandhi's help. The Mahatma was willing to give it. He was aware, too, that conditions were starting to ripen for another all-India challenge to the Raj. If Congress chose to fight again, he and Vallabhbhai would be needed.

White horses pulled Motilal's chariot in Calcutta. Designated "commander of Congress's volunteer force", Subhas Bose wore an officer's uniform. But it was a short step from pomp to a storm. Motilal did not want to give up Dominion status. Jawaharlal and Bose did not want to touch it. Gandhi proposed, as a compromise, that two years be given to Britain. If Dominion status and the rest of the Nehru Report was not conceded in that time, Congress would fight; it would also, in that case, settle only for complete independence. Jawaharlal replied that he could not wait even for two minutes, but when the Mahatma told the AICC that he would reduce the waiting period from two years to one, the younger Nehru and Subhas Bose said they would not press their opposition. The AICC passed Gandhi's resolution by 118 to 45, and Bose issued a press statement that he would not vote against it at the open session.

However, when the resolution was presented three days later to the open session, Bose proposed an amendment asking for a complete break with the British, and Jawaharlal supported the amendment. "I did so half-heartedly," Jawaharlal was to say later.²⁰⁸ Gandhi's bluntness at the about-turn of Subhas and Jawahar matched Vallabhbhai's style. Said the Mahatma:

*You may take the name of independence on your lips but all your muttering will be an empty formula if there is no honour behind it. If you are not prepared to stand by your words, where will independence be?*²⁰⁹

Yet Bose had many supporters at the Calcutta open session. Though his amendment was lost, he obtained 973 votes for it; 1,350 voted against. The future would see Jawaharlal wholly and Subhas partially reconciled to the Mahatma, but not two others who also opposed the Nehru Report at Calcutta. At an All Parties Conference that was held alongside the Congress session, Jinnah and Muhammad Ali attacked as insufficient the Report's provisions for Muslim representation in the provinces and at the centre. Though describing Jinnah as "a spoilt child", Tej Bahadur Sapru, the Liberal leader, urged Congress to give Jinnah what he wanted "and be finished with it",²¹⁰ but Congress feared a Hindu and Sikh backlash and turned down Sapru's plea. Jinnah described Calcutta as "the parting of the ways"²¹¹ and an indignant Muhammad Ali exhorted Muslims to stay away in future from Congress's meetings.

An eye-witness account left by Kripalani suggests that Calcutta's heated arguments left Vallabhbhai cold. It shows also that not everyone had heard of him or of his Bardoli deed:

*Vallabhbhai and I only occasionally attended the discussions. One evening, after wandering in the city, we found ourselves near the Congress pandal. We decided to attend the session. I had my pass but Vallabhbhai had left his at home. The volunteers at the gate would not allow him to enter the pandal. My telling them that my companion was Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel of Bardoli fame left them unimpressed. They had never heard of him. We had therefore to return home though not much disappointed.*²¹²

The Calcutta gathering felicitated Vallabhbhai on Bardoli, but only after supporters of "complete independence", decrying as feudal the use of honours and titles, had successfully demanded the removal of the word "Sardar" from the congratulatory resolution when it was discussed in committee. Absent during this discussion, Vallabhbhai afterwards said that Congress was right "in depriving me of my Sardarship",²¹³ but the opponents of the prefix had overestimated the influence of amendments and resolutions on popular usage. Duly shorn of "Sardar", the resolution was moved in open session. At once the cry went up, "Where is the Sardar?" Well, where was he? Sitting cross-legged among the Gujarat delegates on the open ground. "The Sardar must stand and show himself," people shouted. He stood up and folded his hands in a greeting. "To the platform!" cried everyone. Vallabhbhai signalled a refusal with his hand and tried to resume his seat but he was pushed on to the stage against his will. Applause broke out and continued for minutes. When it finally ended, Vallabhbhai expressed his thanks. The two short sentences he spoke in Hindi constitute his entire public utterance in Calcutta, but the session received a message it seemed to need, which was that words were less important than deeds:

*I thank you for having congratulated the peasants of Bardoli. If you are genuinely appreciative of what they have done, I hope you will follow in their footsteps.*²¹⁴

FOUR
1929-34
PRISONER



THE double-storeyed house that came up at Bardoli's Swaraj Ashram had floors of grey stone, brick walls, two 15'×15' rooms on the ground floor and a large 15'×30' room on the upper storey. If you faced the house, Vallabhbhai's was the room on the right and Manibehn's on the left. In front of the room was a five-foot-wide verandah containing a hichko where Patel could relax. Apart from his bed, the furniture in Vallabhbhai's room consisted of a thin mattress on the floor for sitting, a bolster against the wall for his back, and a low desk for writing. Callers sat in front of him on the floor, except when they were disabled or unaccustomed, when a chair or straw mat was brought in from the Ashram. The nivar bed had well-made wooden legs. The upstairs room was used by guests – at times Gandhi and his entourage. The sun lit the house by day, kerosene lamps, as few as possible, by night. The bathroom was outside the house, and water was fetched in buckets from a well. Vallabhbhai and Manibehn took their meals in the Ashram refectory and Uttamchand Shah, secretary of the Ashram, kept Patel supplied with "555" cigarettes, more a quiet than a secret arrangement. Vallabhbhai smoked four or five a day, mostly outside the house and seldom before others.¹ The ground on all four sides of the house was soon filled by fruit trees and flowering plants – mango, chiku and banana, bougainvillea, raat-ki-rani and rose. Some grew as a result of Patel's personal labour.

The house was used by him from 1929 to the summer of 1942 but not continuously. Until 1930 he retained his Khamasa Chowk place in Ahmedabad and from time to time lived in it; between 1930 and 1934 he spent several spells in the Raj's prisons; and from the summer of 1934 Bombay rather than Bardoli became his principal base; yet Bardoli served as his out-of-prison headquarters until 1934 and remained a regular haunt thereafter. Manibehn was now his constant companion and always would be, cleaning and tidying up his room, making his bed, looking after his papers, clothing him with her yarn, regulating his appointments, travelling with him, and, more often

than not, going to prison when he went. Dahyabhai was in Bombay. He and Yashoda were now parents: Bipin, Vallabhbhai's first grandson, was born in 1927.

In June 1929 Vallabhbhai lost his brother Narsibhai. The first of Ladba's five sons to die, Narsibhai was murdered following a quarrel over a road between Karamsad station and the village. Apparently the killer or killers disliked the road's alignment and blamed Narsibhai for it. Three years after the murder a man was arrested and charged, but his trial ended in acquittal. Vallabhbhai, who was campaigning against land revenue in the Marathi districts when the murder occurred, blamed his "public life" that had kept him out of touch with Karamsad. "I haven't gone home for years," he complained to Mahadev – only Karamsad was "home", not the Ahmedabad residence, not even the house in Bardoli. But for this "public life", he added, he might have managed to visit Karamsad and avert the tragedy. "Narsibhai didn't study English, didn't get out of the village and so didn't come into fame," Vallabhbhai would say, "but in intelligence and commonsense he was capable of leaving Vithalbhai and me far behind."²

Annoyance at "public life" was a momentary reaction. He was its willing slave. It enjoined travel and speaking. He went to Surat district's tribals and warned them against liquor. He warned liquor merchants against attempts to sabotage the temperance campaign that was one of Bardoli's offshoots. When he found that these attempts were encouraged from adjoining princely states, he uttered words that spared none and foreshadowed the future:

I do not know when I shall finish fighting the British, but the effect of the awakening in the British part of India is bound to be felt in Baroda and thereafter you (in Baroda) would be well advised to deal with your people fairly.

Here (Unai village) the boundaries of Baroda and Vansda States meet. From the palace of the ruler of Baroda to the poor man's cottage, drink has played havoc....I hear that the ruler of Vansda is a good man, but he cannot face the prospect of his income from excise going down.

I consider it beneath my self-respect to fight these States. These tiny States could be conquered with ease.³

His natural self-confidence had been boosted by Bardoli and possibly also by an expression by Gandhi of his belief that Patel would not die before escorting India to liberty.⁴ In great demand as a speaker, Vallabhbhai strove to prepare his audiences for a struggle. Frank as ever, he asked workers in Kathiawad "to distinguish between politeness and flattery" and the people of Maharashtra "to

combine with your capacity for sacrifice the practical business sense of Gujarat". Criticized, while presiding at the Maharashtra Political Conference, for describing untouchability as "a blot on the Hindu religion", he countered, "Do you suggest, then, that it is a blot on Islam or Christianity?"⁵ He had not wanted to go to this conference, but Gandhi pressed him and he went, a pattern repeated when C.R. urged Vallabhbhai to preside at the Tamil Nadu Political Conference in Vedaranyam on the southeastern coast.

C. R. took Vallabhbhai all across the Tamil country. For the first time since his Nadiad school days, Patel made speeches in English. "Occasional grammatical errors crept into his speech",⁶ but more striking was his frankness. The stubborn anti-Brahmin sentiment in Tamil Nadu was tackled head on by Vallabhbhai, who asked the non-Brahmins to beware of "the real Brahmins", the British:

Morning and evening you go to offer prayers to them. Do you not wish to stop them from treating you as slaves?...When you see so many of the most learned of Brahmins stand humbly in front of a non-Brahmin like Gandhiji, why are you troubled over the so-called superiority of Brahmins?

He had candid words for a campaign in Tamil Nadu against marriage ceremonies: "You may not want a Brahmin to conduct a marriage ceremony, but surely you want some qualified witnesses.... If you destroy all ritual and custom, any scoundrel would be able to abduct a respectable person's daughter and produce half-a-dozen witnesses to swear that the girl was his wife. What would you do then?" Some anti-Brahmin journals reacted angrily against the bluntness, but his listeners loved it. Their opinion was reflected in the remark of an old peasant who, enchanted by Patel's speaking, followed him everywhere in Tamil Nadu: "Never before have we seen anyone who has understood our difficulties as this man, and never before have we seen anyone explaining things in so simple a manner."⁷

At his first meeting in Karnataka, where he went next, nine local worthies spoke apart from him: one as chairman, one to propose the chairman to the chair, another to second the proposal, a fourth to welcome Vallabhbhai in English, another to welcome him in Kannada, two others to propose and second thanks to Patel, and the last two to thank the chairman. An additional number mounted the stage one by one to garland Vallabhbhai. At his instance the gestures were axed out of the remaining Karnataka meetings. Vallabhbhai's host in Karnataka was Gangadharrao Deshpande, who had been one of Tilak's close associates before joining Gandhi. Deshpande remarked that he could hear echoes of Tilak Maharaj in Patel's frank

language. He did not know that C.R. had made an identical comment in Tamil Nadu, and Rajaji did not know that Mahadev had said the same thing the previous year in his Gujarati booklet, *Vir Vallabhbhai* ("Brave Vallabhbhai"):

*After watching his manner of speech, his smile and his laughter, his anger and his impatience, one cannot but be reminded of Tilak Maharaj. Both appeared at first sight to be arrogant and standoffish, whereas they were humble and gentle.*⁸

In December came a tour of Bihar, where, addressing peasants and speaking in a Hindi peppered with Gujarati, Patel surpassed himself in directness:

I have not come to bless you but to swear at you, you who have had the honour of having Mahatmaji in your midst before any other province, you who do not seem to deserve that honour. The tyrannous hand of the planter is no more there to strike you dumb, and yet you are like dumb, driven cattle.

Day in and day out you are full of complaints against your zamindar, but you do not stir yourselves to give him a good shaking....If the zamindars do not come to terms, refuse to cultivate for them.

Are you not ashamed that you keep your women behind a purdah? Who are these ladies? Your mothers, sisters, wives. Is it that you are afraid that if they came out they would see your slavery and have nothing more to do with you?

If I could I would say to these ladies, rather than be wives to such cowardly husbands, divorce them.

*The Brahmin who in the name of religion gets people to marry children of tender age is no Brahmin but a monster. You kisans who have become willing victims to the tyranny of the zamindar and the Brahmin do not deserve the name of kisans.*⁹

The inequitous size of land revenue was Vallabhbhai's theme in many of the 1929 speeches. He believed it to be the issue that could unite all of India against the Raj. The Mahatma was not so sure. In September 1929 he discussed the subject in *Young India*. While acknowledging Bardoli's significance and Patel's abilities, Gandhi added: "But he needs a Bardoli to make good his leadership. How many Bardolis are there ready in the country today?"¹⁰ Bardoli's well-prepared peasants, aided by a seasoned team, had won a non-violent battle, but unprepared and unaided peasants elsewhere were liable to lose self-control and the battle as well.

Another key question involved Gandhi and Patel: Congress's presidency. A successor to Motilal had to be chosen. "The general feeling in Congress circles" – Subhas Bose would afterwards write – "was that the honour should go to Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel."¹¹ Many, however, felt that the Mahatma should become President himself, especially since he would lead the expected clash with Britain. C.R. held this view and it is likely that, partially or wholly, Patel shared it. "Everyone is anxious to make Gandhiji the president," he had said in Vedaranyam in the first week of September. Ten provincial committees of Congress proposed Gandhi's name and the Mahatma was in fact announced as the next President.

But he refused to accept the honour and the field was reduced to Vallabhbhai, the choice of five PCCs, and Jawaharlal, recommended by three. At the end of September the AICC met in Lucknow and urged Gandhi to reconsider his refusal. The Mahatma said he could not. Two youthful and eager backers of Jawaharlal's nomination, Narendra Dev and Balkrishna Sharma, both from the U.P., put pressure on Vallabhbhai. "What does Sardar say? What is Sardar going to do?" they kept asking. Recalling their role nineteen years later, Patel would speak of them as Jawaharlal's "hounds at the time". He resented their importunity but withdrew his name the moment Gandhi asked him to.¹²

Vallabhbhai's prompt compliance was expected in a man of his record but, as the "hounds" remark indicates, it left unpleasant memories. There were several reasons. To begin with, Congress's 1929-30 President was going to be more than that: he would inaugurate the struggle to which Congress was pledged, declare complete independence as India's goal and possibly project himself as Gandhi's successor. Secondly, Jawaharlal was a much younger man, and yielding to a younger man was not part of the Patidar code. Letting Vithalbhai have that passage to the U.K. in 1905 may have been in excess of the code but it was not contrary to it. Yielding to Jawaharlal was. Thirdly, Vallabhbhai did not believe that Jawaharlal's views were all sound or that he would make a better President. Fourthly, Vallabhbhai was aware that, given the age difference, any precedence now established would be hard to reverse later.

Fifthly, and this may have been the most hurtful reflection of all, he had been found wanting by the one for whose sake he had given up home and hearth and whose opinion mattered more to him than anything else. The "hounds" preferring Jawaharlal was one thing, Gandhi doing it another. Finally, Vallabhbhai would have felt unhappy about the very thing that delighted Motilal and sent

Jawaharlal's mother, Swaruprani, to "a sort of ecstasy" – the succession from father to son.¹³ Presiding at the Lahore Congress at the end of the year, Jawaharlal would affirm that he was "a republican and no believer in kings and princes", yet the succession was described by admirers of Motilal and Jawaharlal in terms of "a king passing on the sceptre of the throne to his logical successor".¹⁴ Though less touchy than Jawaharlal about Dominion status, Vallabhbhai had an inner republicanism that could not have rejoiced at Congress's throne passing directly from a father to his son.

The pill, therefore, was bitter. Yet it was swallowed without hesitation. Conscious of his pledge to heed the Mahatma, Vallabhbhai nipped all hurt and distaste in the bud. One thing, however, was clearly understood by Gandhi, Jawahar and everybody else: in Gujarat only Patel's writ would run, not the Congress President's, and not even the Mahatma's. Vallabhbhai's 1905 sacrifice in favour of Vithalbhai had carried, we saw, a stipulation. His 1929 sacrifice in Jawahar's favour also carried one – his hand would remain free in Gujarat.

Why did Gandhi prefer Jawaharlal at this juncture? Anxious to see his son installed as President in his lifetime,¹⁵ Motilal had been soliciting Gandhi's aid right from 1927.¹⁶ The Mahatma had decided in favour of Dr M. A. Ansari in 1927. In July 1928, in the letter quoted earlier, Motilal reminded the Mahatma of Jawaharlal's claims, and he returned to the theme in 1929. However, evidence of pressure or entreaty from Motilal is not essential to an explanation of Gandhi's choice. The Mahatma's own reasons, publicly given in July 1929, were quite frank. He reckoned, firstly, that Nehru would rally young men and women. Secondly, he hoped that "responsibility will mellow and sober the youth", and it is clear that he meant "Jawaharlal" by "the youth". Thirdly, he was confident, despite the verbal to-and-fro at the Calcutta Congress, that Jawaharlal would abide by his views. "His being in the chair is as good as my being in it," Gandhi said. Moreover, Gandhi saw assurance in the fact that "a President of the Congress is not an autocrat....He can no more impose his views on the people than the English King."¹⁷

There were other reasons. Following the December 1928 "parting of the ways" of which Jinnah had spoken, many Muslims had ended their links with Congress, and Jawaharlal seemed more likely than Vallabhbhai to re-attract some of them. Apparently Abul Kalam Azad, whose tie with Congress was unaffected, expressed the view in 1929 that "Jawaharlal would make a great appeal to Muslim youth".¹⁸ Also, Gandhi hoped that young radicals tempted by Communist ideas would remain with Congress if Jawaharlal became President, and that the move might simultaneously help "to wean Nehru himself from the drift to the far left", to quote Jawaharlal's biographer, Brecher.¹⁹

Making the same point in Marxian terminology, E. M. S. Namboodiripad, the Communist Chief Minister of Kerala in 1957-59 and 1967-69, speaks of "revolutionary forces" that Gandhi sought to "tame" by installing "a widely accepted young leader like Jawaharlal who was a devoted disciple of Gandhi". Namboodiripad's view that this also ensured that Jawaharlal "did not cross the bounds" seems valid.²⁰

Kripalani, who met Gandhi before Vallabhbhai or Jawaharlal did, wrote in the 1970s that the Mahatma's reasons for Jawaharlal's nomination "were personal rather than political". In Kripalani's view, "the two were emotionally attached to each other, deny it though they may".²¹ "Another possible explanation," added Kripalani, "can be that Gandhiji...like the good shepherd, left the many going straight and ran after the one going astray",²² an opinion strengthened by Gandhi's apparent remark in 1929 that "Sardar Patel would be with him in any case".²³ Contrary, however, to what Kripalani suggests, the Mahatma did not deny an emotional attachment to Jawaharlal. He spoke and wrote freely of it, yet, as we have seen, he was willing in December 1928 to tender a public rebuke to Jawaharlal. Earlier, in January 1928, Gandhi had written to Jawaharlal of their "vast" and "radical" differences that seemed to leave "no meeting ground between us", and referred to a possible "dissolution of partnership",²⁴ but Jawaharlal retreated and the breach did not occur.

The Gandhi-Vallabhbhai relationship was not devoid of feeling either. Yet it was qualitatively different from the Gandhi-Nehru tie. To say, as Patel himself seems to have done, that the Mahatma was partial towards one of his two "sons",²⁵ does not correctly describe the difference. It is better brought out in Kishorlal Mashruwala's summing-up:

*I would describe the Gandhi-Patel relationship as that of brothers, Gandhi being the senior brother, and Gandhi-Nehru as that of father and son.*²⁶

Gandhi's claim in Bardoli, noted earlier, that he was Vallabhbhai's "elder brother" lends support to one half of Mashruwala's explanation. The other half is corroborated by Jawaharlal's response to Gandhi's preparedness for a "dissolution" in early 1928. "Am I not your child in politics," Jawaharlal wrote, "though perhaps a truant and errant child?"²⁷ While the ideal younger brother – indispensable, loyal to the core and dependable – may be taken for granted, a son is fussed over though he may also, at times, be threatened with disinheritance. A younger brother may become a regent but the son will be the heir. A younger brother will influence the ruler in the

latter's lifetime, a son may postpone his schemes until the ruler is no more and he succeeds to the throne.

The prestige and influence of a loyal younger brother matter to a ruler, and we have seen that Gandhi played his part in strengthening Patel's standing. He safeguarded Vallabhbhai's authority in Bardoli and pressed him to show himself to conferences in different parts of the land. But the difference between younger brother and son would remain – and so would the younger brother's greater ability to influence the ruler in his lifetime. As Mashruwala also put it, "Bapu began early to look upon Jawaharlal as the destined leader of India after him",²⁸ whereas Patel was a leader along with Gandhi. Vallabhbhai was an indispensable part of Gandhi's team; Jawaharlal would lead a future team. The pattern was affected, if not determined, by the ages of the three.

Gandhi's choice, as he looked to the future, was confined to Patel and Jawaharlal. True, there was Subhas. There was Rajaji whom, indeed, Gandhi had described in 1927 as "the only possible successor".²⁹ There was Rajendra Prasad. There was Abul Kalam Azad. All four had serious disqualifications, however. Subhas's commitment to democracy seemed uncertain. C.R. could not communicate with the Hindi heartland. Prasad was too mild and Azad too aloof. Gandhi's choice in the autumn of 1929 was thus restricted to Vallabhbhai, who alone had caused the Raj to bend, and Jawaharlal, whom the youth loved. If Patel swallowed the pill with only a fleeting grimace, Jawaharlal, doubtless aware of what his biographer Gopal describes as "the general feeling... that he was still unseasoned for the presidency",³⁰ felt an acute embarrassment that he would later recall:

*I have seldom felt quite so annoyed and humiliated....It was not that I was not sensible of the honour....But I did not come to it by the main entrance or even a side entrance: I appeared suddenly by a trap door and bewildered the audience into acceptance.*³¹

* * *

Irwin, the Viceroy, announced on October 31 that HMG wished to meet representatives of British India and of Indian States in London. To help realize the wish, Sapru, the Liberal leader, and Vithalbhai, still presiding over the Central Assembly, arranged a meeting on December 23 between Irwin and three Indians: Gandhi, Motilal, who was in the final week of his Congress presidency, and Jinnah. Hours before the meeting, a bomb exploded in the special train on which Irwin was returning from a tour. The Viceregal dining car was damaged and a servant was injured but fortunately

Irwin was unhurt. After he and his callers had spent 45 minutes on the incident, Irwin said, "How shall we start?" Gandhi's response was direct. "Will the London conference proceed on the basis of Dominion status?" he asked. Irwin replied that he was not able to offer such an assurance, and the gathering dispersed.³²

Vallabhbhai and C.R. were lodged next to each other in tents when Congress met a few days later in Lahore. It was bitterly cold, yet, as the Congress historian, Pattabhi Sitaramayya, would write: "The heat of passion and excitement, the resentment at the failure of negotiation, the flushing of faces on hearing the war drums – oh, it was all in marked contrast with the weather."³³ At midnight on New Year's eve, Patel watched Jawaharlal hoist the tricolour on the banks of the Ravi. By this time Congress had declared that its goal was complete independence, asked Swarajists to resign their legislature seats and authorized the AICC to launch civil disobedience when suitable. A resolution embodying these points was comfortably passed, but Subhas Bose opposed Gandhi when the latter wanted to congratulate Irwin on his escape. Losing narrowly in the voting, Bose walked out. With the support of Srinivasa Iyengar, who had presided at the 1926 Gauhati Congress, he formed the Congress Democratic Party as a faction within the national body.

The new Working Committee, picked more by Gandhi and Motilal than by Jawaharlal, included Vallabhbhai and C.R., both back after six years of voluntary exile. It chose January 26 for a countrywide test of fervour. In obedience to Gandhi's instructions, no speeches were made. The tricolour was raised, an independence pledge, which included a readiness to withhold taxes, was read out and those present were asked to raise hands if they agreed with it. Place upon place that Sunday morning was a forest of hands. Getting the message, 172 members of legislatures, including 30 at the centre, resigned by February. At the trumpet's sound, Indians would launch their non-violent attack.

But where? And how? Gandhi was, in his words, "furiously thinking" about a plan of action. It had to be defiant enough to attract the "secret, silent, persevering band" of young men lured by violence, and simple enough to be adopted by every Indian.³⁴ Patel, we have seen, had his answer: refuse land revenue. As far as Kheda was concerned, peasants hurt by three years of poor harvests were demanding a suspension of revenue. Backing their demand, Vallabhbhai had advised the farmers of two Kheda talukas, Matar and Mehmedabad, not to pay revenue. The Collector of Kheda was Alfred Master, whose clash with Patel in 1918 was noted in the opening chapter. Afraid of inviting another Bardoli, Master announced a year's suspension of revenue in Matar and Mehmedabad, thereby whetting Vallabhbhai's appetite for an India-wide clash over revenue.

But the Mahatma felt that such a clash might slide into violence and also that the peasants would invite ruin if they linked revenue refusal to Swaraj.

In the middle of February Gandhi found his solution: break the salt law. By taxing the manufacture and sale of salt, a gift of nature, the Government was hurting the poorest Indian, even the sick, the maimed and the utterly helpless. If everyone was hurt by the salt law, everyone could defy it. All that a satyagrahi needed to do was to walk to a coast where the salt lay, bend down and scoop it up. Those unable to go to a shore could break the law by selling or buying untaxed salt. The defiance would be picturesque; it would exert maximum pressure with the minimum risk of violence; and it would not cost peasants their land or cattle.

His heart set on a revenue struggle, Patel did not like Gandhi's choice of salt. He was sufficiently grumpy to stay out of tactical meetings in Sabarmati. When Mahadev asked him about his absence, Vallabhbhai answered testily:

*How am I interested in them? Do as he wants you to do. Let him go to jail and then I shall give you my programme, but no discussion until he is out.*³⁵

Another reason for Patel's discontent was a remark in the British Parliament that not a dog had barked in India on Gandhi's 1922 arrest. Certain that the Mahatma would soon be arrested, Vallabhbhai could not wait to prepare Gujarat's reply. "Let there be innumerable arrests," he said in Bharuch on February 11, "so that the world may find out for itself whether the dog can bark or not."³⁶ He wanted to be in the countryside, stirring it up, not at meetings. To free himself completely for rebellion, he gave up his Khamasa Chowk house.

If Patel was not excited by salt, Jawaharlal was mystified by it. So were others. As C.R. put it, at first many reacted by saying, "Hello, this is a funny thing. All along Gandhi was saying that if we made khadi we will get Swaraj. Now he says we must make salt also!"³⁷ But there was no time for complaining. Gandhi had asked Vallabhbhai to tell him where on Gujarat's coastline he should break the salt law and also recommend the route he should take to walk to it. Patel shifted the burden to two of satyagraha's most experienced practitioners, Mohanlal Pandya and Ravishankar Maharaj. The two proposed Dandi in Surat district, a coastal village where the sea normally left a layer of salt, as the site for satyagraha, and they chalked out a 241-mile route to it from Sabarmati, taking in scores of villages in the districts of Kheda, Bharuch and Surat. The Mahatma announced that he would set forth for Dandi on March 12.

Alfred Master decided to act when Gandhi declared that he would break the salt law and ask others to do likewise.³⁸ Putting Vallabhbhai out of the way was the first item on Master's agenda. Thus far Patel had escaped arrest. Gandhi and almost all his colleagues were put behind bars in 1921-22 but not Vallabhbhai: the defiance that he was to organize had been cancelled because of Chauri Chaura. The Nagpur, Borsad and Bardoli battles that followed saw many arrested but not their General. "Can I help it if my palm-lines show no prison?" was his response to comment on his unfamiliarity with the Raj's jails.³⁹ Now, however, Master was ready to re-interpret Patel's palm.

When it was announced that he would address a meeting on salt in Kankapura village in Borsad taluka, Master made up his mind to forbid Vallabhbhai from speaking in Kheda district for a month. Unaware of Master's intentions, Patel proceeded on March 7 to Kankapura. On the way he stopped for lunch at the village of Ras, 5 miles from the coast. Residents of Ras urged him to address them. "We took part in the Kheda struggle," they said. "We are in the front rank in khadi. We are ready to fulfil all the satyagraha conditions. Have we committed a crime that you should pass through Ras and yet not address us?" "How many in Ras are ready for prison?" Vallabhbhai asked. Soon about two hundred men showed themselves and said they were prepared. "Are the women ready too?" Patel asked. A group of young and old women said they were. "All right," said Vallabhbhai, "I will speak after lunch at 2 p.m. and then leave for Kankapura."

At 2 p.m. Patel took the speaker's seat on a platform under a banyan tree in Ras. Thousands had gathered to hear him. He was about to commence his speech when Master's men arrived. One of them, Borsad's first-class magistrate, served a notice on Vallabhbhai asking him not to speak. After Patel read the notice, the magistrate asked him, "What do you intend to do?" "I will ignore the notice and speak," said Vallabhbhai. "I order your arrest," returned the magistrate. "Come this way," added police superintendent Billimoria.

Patel rose from his seat, farewelled the audience and stepped smiling and laughing into the police car. He was taken to a Borsad courtroom where he was tried by Alfred Master himself. All lawyers were asked to leave; the only people present were Master, Vallabhbhai and the two officials who had effected Patel's arrest. No witnesses were examined. Vallabhbhai pleaded guilty, but Master took an hour and a half to write a judgment of eight lines, his mind almost numbed by the presence of one he both resented and feared. Not reading out the judgment he had written, he merely told Patel that he was being awarded the maximum sentence under the law: three months simple imprisonment and a fine of Rs 500, or an additional three weeks in jail.

For all his spirited demeanour, the arrest had taken Vallabhbhai unawares. The Bombay Government, too, was surprised. Learning of Master's intention to prohibit Patel from speaking, it had instructed him "to hold up order if not already served" but this word was too late. Though privately deploring his individualistic action, the Bombay Government acknowledged Master's "admirable skill in executing his arrangements" and noted that by delaying the service of his order until Vallabhbhai had "changed his plans and prepared to begin speaking", Master had denied Vallabhbhai a chance to disengage himself. Patel felt "deceived" but found a chance to hit back at Master shortly before he was driven to prison. Watching Vallabhbhai transfer cash and papers to Mohanlal Pandya, who had followed the police car to Borsad, Master had asked Patel how much he was handing over. Vallabhbhai realized, as he later admitted, that Master had asked the question "so that he might recover part of the fine", but the opportunity to embarrass his antagonist was irresistible. "It's public money!" Patel rasped. "You had better be careful!"

Billimoria then took Vallabhbhai to Sabarmati jail but not before stopping briefly outside the Mahatma's Ashram, a gesture that enabled Patel to say a quick farewell to Gandhi. Outside the jail gate Billimoria offered a cigarette to Vallabhbhai, who was about to take it when he changed his mind and declined. "But you smoke, don't you?" the superintendent asked. "Yes, I do," said Patel, "but you will not let me smoke inside, will you?" So saying, he stopped smoking for good.⁴⁰

It was with concentrated attention – "as if he was listening to a story from scripture"⁴¹ – that Gandhi heard a blow-by-blow account of Ras and Borsad. Then he presided at a meeting on the Sabarmati banks at which the citizens of Ahmedabad recorded their "firm determination to follow Sardar Vallabhbhai to jail". They added: "We shall not rest in peace nor shall we let the Government rest in peace."⁴² Vallabhbhai's arrest thus kicked off India's 1930 clash with the Raj before its scheduled start. Roused by the imprisonment of their hero, Gujarat's peasants backed the rebellion with redoubled fervour.

Staid constitutionalists, too, were perturbed. Could there be a trial without witnesses? Was it lawful to convict a man who intended an offence but did not commit it? Where was Patel's freedom of speech after the order served on him in Ras? Among the men who raised the questions in the Central Assembly were Malaviya and Jinnah, both referring to Vallabhbhai as "Sardar Patel". Though Master's action had been unauthorized, the Raj was unwilling to disown its Collector in Kheda. Patel's arrest was defended in the Assembly, and officials and nominated members ensured the defeat of a motion criticizing it.

Vallabhbhai was in Sabarmati Jail from March 7 to June 26, a total of 111 days. A diary he kept during the first 45 days, an article Mahadev

wrote after visiting him in jail and the recollections of Ravishankar, who soon joined Patel in prison, provide glimpses into Vallabhbhai's life there. According to the diary, Billimoria, who had delivered Patel to the prison, "wept copiously" while taking his leave. The prison's instruments found him 5' 5 1/2" tall and 146 lbs in weight. He slept on blankets spread on the floor, shared a cell with murderers, was locked in for the evening and the night and denied a lantern for reading. The jowar roti supplied daily had to be soaked in water before it could be eaten. "One of the warders," Vallabhbhai recorded, "was deeply moved when he saw me eating jowar roti and pressed me to exchange it for his wheat roti, but while I thanked the kindly warder, I refused the offer." Another warder cut twigs from a neem tree for Patel to use for scrubbing his teeth. Fellow-prisoners, too, were kind, cleaning the latrine for him and offering for his baths some of the precious warm water they received on Sundays for washing their clothes.

Mahadev and Kripalani were allowed to meet Vallabhbhai on the afternoon of March 10. The superintendent and jailor, both of them Indians, were present during the interview. "You shouldn't have deceived Bapu like that," said Kripalani, commenting on Patel's unexpectedly early entry into prison. "They deceived me," Vallabhbhai replied, referring to Master and company. When Mahadev enquired about jail food, Patel asked him not to bother/ and added, "I can live on air for three months" and "burst into a loud laugh". On Vallabhbhai asking Mahadev to send a cake of soap and his shaving things, the superintendent butted in: "No razor allowed, but we shall allow you facilities for a shave."

"I know what kind of a shave you will give me," retorted Patel. The jailor, who was the superintendent's subordinate, courageously proposed a compromise. "In this case, sir," he said, addressing his superior, "a razor might be allowed, provided he does not keep it in his possession. We shall give it to him when he wants it." "But why not give me a razor and allow me to shave the others?" said Vallabhbhai. "I will then have work to my credit." As Mahadev put it, "even the little parts of that inhuman machinery called the jail department could not help creaking with laughter." Recovering his dignity, the jailor pointed out to Patel, "You may have your soap but it should not be scented soap." Once more "the jail rang with laughter".⁴³

Conditions improved after Mahadev's report was published in *Young India*. Vallabhbhai's cell was no longer locked from the outside. A few books and a chair sent by Ambalal Sarabhai were allowed in, as also a mattress and a pair of bedsheets, a lantern, a spinning wheel and some cooking utensils. Tea, milk, ghee and curd were added to his rations. One day he even ate some fruit, sent by the

Kanugas and cleared by the jail chiefs. More prisoners arrived too, most of them satyagrahis: the battle outside was warming up. Patel demanded that the other politicals should get the food he had been granted. When the demand was turned down, he said he would eat what they were being given. Told that he could only get "A" category rations, he went on a fast; after three days his demand for inferior food was conceded.

Not forgetting the convicts, he would ask Ravishankar to give them the bread that at times was left over from the rations supplied to the politicals. But he did not neglect the latter. Finding that the katori in which ghee was sent to Patel was always completely dry when it came back to the jail kitchen, the superintendent, who did not know that Vallabhbhai was sharing his ghee with some of his friends, asked him one day, "Are you getting enough ghee or shall I arrange for more?" Patel replied: "I am a peasant. Does a peasant's son ever ask anyone for food? You give as much as you want to." "More ghee was sent thereafter," says Ravishankar.⁴⁴

Getting up between four and five in the morning, he would pray for a while. This was a new practice, a product of the impact of imprisonment. The diary jottings do not indicate how he prayed but refer to the *Ramayana* and *Gita* he had obtained from the jail chiefs and to the *Bhajanavali*, the book of bhajans used in the Mahatma's Ashram that Mahadev had sent, and to evening prayers as well. "Morning and evening Vallabhbhai would sing bhajans at prayer time from the *Bhajanavali* and not give thought to where he was sitting, who was coming in or who was going out," Ravishankar would later recall.⁴⁵ Spinning, reading, eating, talking with fellow prisoners and pacing under the three neem trees in the jail compound were his other activities. There were days when Ravishankar found him "spinning from morning to evening, and thinking all the while".⁴⁶ The entry of newspapers was banned but occasionally he was able to borrow the superintendent's copy of the *Times of India*. Among the books he read were *Emma Hamilton* and O'Connor's *Memoirs of an Old Parliamentarian*, both lent by Ambalal.

Eight others slept in his room, which couldn't take any more, but by day thirty-odd politicals would squash into it, "treating the jail as nothing more than a residential camp at a political conference".⁴⁷ The Kanugas visited him ten days after he was jailed, Manibehn a week thereafter, Dahyabhai and Yashoda a month after that. Kasturba also called. His friend Godfrey Davis, now Ahmedabad's district judge, dropped by and urged Congress's participation in the London conference. Other officials visited him to probe his mind and found him as blunt as ever. He told Taylor, the Collector of Ahmedabad, that Alfred Master had been guilty of "improper conduct"; and when Garrett, now the Commissioner of the Northern Division, visited the

jail, Patel disobeyed the superintendent's instructions to "stand in front of our rooms". Garrett complained to him that "the people were not paying their land revenue dues" and received, according to Patel's diary, the following reply: "Of course they would not pay. To expect that you could recover land revenue by imprisoning a few leaders was a mistake." Vallabhbhai went on to tell Garrett – who in 1927 had probed Patel regarding an award from the Raj – that he "had not met any officer... as rigid and as ruthless as he was". The entry for "Wednesday, March 12, 1930" reads as follows:

I said my prayers on waking up at 4 a.m. I then read the Bhagvad Gita. I asked God's intercession for the struggle in which Gandhiji was about to embark from the Ashram between 6 and 6.30 a.m.

Another entry is as follows: "Sunday, 6.4.30: Woke up at 4 o'clock today, and prayed to God for success for the national week, and requested Him to see that Gujarat's honour is upheld..." That morning Gandhi broke the salt law at Dandi, a deed that triggered nationwide emulation. Vallabhbhai's fear that the soil was only half prepared when he was removed had been proved false.

Tuesday, 8.4.30: Up at 5 a.m. and then other duties as usual. At 10.30 a.m. Mahadev came to see me... Heard the stories of high-handedness of the Collector of Kheda, who had sentenced a number of people from Kheda to 2 years rigorous imprisonment.

I was told of the magnificent response of Gujarat and that Bapu was very pleased with this response. I was delighted to hear about this.

A batch of Kheda prisoners were in the prison by now. On the night of April 9, Patel, in his own words, "sat up till one a.m. listening to the account of the events after my arrest in Kheda district from Gokaldas (Talati) and Fulchand (Bapuji Shah)." Jail deepened his bond with his colleagues. They had breathed the same stuffy air, gazed at the same unfriendly roof, eaten the same indigestible food, cursed and blessed in common, and lent one another courage or consolation. Vallabhbhai's "eyes were filled with tears as he parted from his colleagues".⁴⁸

* * *

Released on June 26, he found a changed India. The Mahatma, his salt march an astonishing triumph, was behind bars. So was Jawaharlal, the Congress President. Before he was taken to prison, Jawaharlal had named his father acting President. On June 13 Motilal, too, was arrested, but not before passing on the acting President's burden to Patel.

Over four hundred officials in villages on Gandhi's salt route had left the Raj's services. Across India tens of thousands had broken the law and about sixty thousand had gone to prison. The Mahatma was "manufacturing disobedience, not salt", C.R. had pithily said before he and hundreds of others were arrested in Vedaranyam.⁴⁹ Prasad had organized a defiance in Patna. Between April 23 and April 28 the town of Peshawar in the North West Frontier Province was in the hands of the Khudai Khidmatgars, the "Servants of God" led by Abdul Ghaffar Khan, who was pledged to non-violence. Scores of the Khidmatgars were killed by machine-guns but on one occasion Hindu soldiers of the Raj's Garhwali regiment disobeyed orders and refused to fire on the unarmed Muslims. "I certainly am surprised," Irwin wrote to the Secretary of State, "at the dimensions the movement had assumed."⁵⁰

Gujarat had won fame, with Kheda playing a big role. On the 6th of April, 2,500 broke the salt law in the south Kheda village of Badalpur on the coast. The Badalpur law-breaking continued day after day, and on April 13, under a full moon, no less than 20,000 people illegally picked up salt. As Vallabhbhai had noted, Alfred Master reacted indignantly. Those leading the salt-picking were given prison terms of a year or more and sent off to jail "handcuffed in pairs, their arms tied with ropes".⁵¹ A police officer called D. C. Billimoria, in charge of Badalpur, and another called D. A. Laher, who was based in Anand, organized the beating up of salt-pickers and salt-sellers. The excesses of Gujarat were paralleled in other provinces. Between April and December, Irwin ruled through ten Ordinances and exercised powers "wielded by no previous Viceroy".⁵²

The Mahatma was arrested on May 5 after he had informed Irwin that he would lead raids on the salt depots at Dharasana in Surat district, but the raids went ahead and on until June 6, when an imminent monsoon called a halt. Sarojini Naidu and the Mahatma's second son, Manilal, had led 2,500 satyagrahis in an assault on Dharasana on May 21. Supervised by six British officers, four hundred Indian constables used lathis and boots to hit the satyagrahis' heads, abdomens and testicles, but not one offered a return blow. An American journalist, Webb Miller, counted 320 injured.

Kheda had provided large contingents for the Dharasana raids. Volunteers leaving a village for Dharasana were accompanied up to the village boundary by hundreds of fellow-villagers. Baraiyas and Patanvadiyas had wholeheartedly joined the salt struggle in Badalpur and elsewhere, and a number of Baraiya mukhis had resigned. By mid-June there had been resignations in over half the villages of Kheda. In effect, Vallabhbhai's district had de-recognized the Raj.

Ras, the village in Borsad taluka where he had been arrested, was serving as a focal point. On April 21 its residents had resolved not to pay any revenue until Patel and others arrested in Kheda were released. To the proud Patidar peasants of Ras, refusal of revenue was the only manly response to Vallabhbhai's arrest, which their ardour had hastened. It was a response that found an echo in Patidar peasants elsewhere but not among the Baraiyas, Patanvadiyas and others who either did not own land or were so indebted as to have only a fragile hold on it. If a Baraiya lost his land because of non-payment of revenue, a moneylender was likely to claim it, whereas a Patidar losing his land could often rely on his fellow-Patidars to prevent its sale or cultivation. While hesitant, therefore, to withhold land revenue, the poorly-off Baraiya sparked to the salt stir. To him the salt tax was more than a symbol of alien rule: over a year it added up to a week's income. The simplicity and drama of the salt defiance attracted the Patidar also, but refusing revenue was a form of protest the Patidar found difficult to give up.

Ras had been on Gandhi's salt route. When he arrived there on March 19, its residents pressed him to sanction revenue refusal. They were led by a resolute man called Ashabhai Lallubhai Patel. Gandhi tried to dissuade them, pointing out that revenue refusal now would be as different from the 1928 Bardoli struggle "as the earth is from the sky". Bardoli, its scope carefully limited, was launched to remove an economic grievance. Now, Gandhi said to Ashabhai and the others, "we are talking of removing a government".⁵³ Harsh enough during Bardoli, the Raj would stop at nothing now.

But the unbudgeable men of Ras wanted to risk everything. Stating in *Navajivan* that the men of Ras were "attempting the impossible", Gandhi added that this was natural in a district to which Patel, Pandya and Ravishankar belonged, and he did not prohibit the attempt. Thirteen other villages of Borsad taluka joined Ras in refusing revenue. The Baroda factor was once more at work. Many Ras peasants had relatives in the adjoining Baroda villages of Sisva and Jharola, which belonged to the same gol as Ras: moving a Ras resident's valuables to his brother-in-law's house in Sisva or Jharola was a 30-minute affair by bullock-cart.

Confined to Borsad taluka owing to the Mahatma's misgivings, revenue refusal spread elsewhere after his arrest. Bardoli taluka voted to withhold revenue on May 10; on May 18 the AICC announced full Congress support for revenue refusal; and on May 31 Kheda's peasants resolved at a rally in Nadiad that no revenue would be paid until Vallabhbhai and the Mahatma were released. To a large extent, the refusal was only verbal as yet; payments were not due until the end of the year. However, some Nadiad and Borsad villages, including Ras, had managed to withhold the

previous year's revenue, and the Raj was worried. The Home Secretary in New Delhi, Emerson, wrote to the Bombay Government at the end of June that "a widespread extension" of revenue refusal "would probably cause more embarrassment than any other feature of the Civil Disobedience Movement".⁵⁴ So far the Raj had not permanently deprived any rebelling peasant of his land, or any resigning village official of his job; but on July 3, 1930 – a week after Patel's release – the Government of India gave a written commitment to the Government of Bombay that forfeitures of land and resignations of village officials would henceforth be permanent and not negotiable. The hands of Garrett and Master were strengthened.

Vallabhbhai's return to their midst thrilled the people of Gujarat, who were proud of their role in the clash begun three and a half months earlier, and proud too of the fact that not one Englishman had been killed anywhere in India during this period. Mixed with these emotions were anger at the beatings inflicted on the satyagrahis, sympathy for those behind bars and a fear that the free might be arrested or re-arrested. At an Ahmedabad public meeting held as soon as he was released, Patel touched on some of these sentiments and spoke feelingly about the Mahatma and, be it noted, about Jawaharlal:

What shall I say about jail life? Heads were not broken there.... Outside the jail one cannot feel as happy as inside it. How can one eat tasty food and sleep in comfort when the President of the Indian National Congress, the chosen head of the people, is confined behind prison walls, and when the greatest man on earth, Mahatma Gandhi, is kept in the cells of Yeravda jail?

*Many advised me that I should not make a speech lest I should be re-arrested. Why should we worry about the prisons of a mere government? Our souls are prisoners of infatuation and illusion, desire and anger, and it is that prison we should fear most. No empire on earth, however mighty, can keep in bondage the one who of his own accord has broken the fetters of maya.*⁵⁵

Congress's Working Committee was declared an illegal body shortly after Vallabhbhai's release. Many organizations affiliated to Congress were also banned, and their offices and properties taken over. As Congress's acting President, Patel asked "every house in the country to be the office of the Congress Committee, and every individual to be the Congress in himself".⁵⁶ Malaviya, who had remained a constitutionalist despite every provocation, spoke of "the edifice of repression" being built and offered to join the "illegal" WorCom. "Heartily welcoming" Malaviya's offer, Vallabhbhai nominated him to the body.⁵⁷

Earlier, Malaviya had vacated his Central Assembly seat. Vithalbhai followed Malaviya and gave up his places as President and member. His Presidentship had been witty, wordy and prickly. He had fought many a duel with the Raj over the dignity of the President. The Viceroy had to apologize once for "appearing to have criticized Vithalbhai's ruling". On another celebrated occasion, Vithalbhai had barred the Commander-in-Chief, Sir William Birdwood, from speaking to the Assembly. These psychological victories were not of lasting significance but they delighted the public. In the end, however, Vithalbhai was unwilling to continue to preside over a body that existed "merely" – as he put it in his letter of resignation – "to register the decrees of the executive".⁵⁸ Following his resignation, which took place while Vallabhbhai was in prison, Vithalbhai was nominated to the WorCom.

Vallabhbhai's heart was with the peasants of Kheda and Bardoli who had pledged revenue refusal. He didn't openly applaud their resolve: that would have meant an immediate return to prison. But he didn't discourage them. They were adopting a course he had favoured at the start of the year. It would incur the Raj's wrath but he was not going to lower the peasants' morale. He came down strongly on Sapru and Jayakar, the Liberal leaders, when they proposed a settlement between Congress and the Raj, describing them as "busybodies" and cautioning India against exercises that went "against the self-respect of the people" or allowed "our enthusiasm to flag".⁵⁹

His freedom was short-lived. An exercise in upholding morale ended it. On July 31 he, Malaviya and a few other WorCom members led a procession in Bombay to mark Tilak's death anniversary. His daughter was with him. So were several other women, including Hansa Mehta, Congress's "dictator" for Bombay. Stopped at VT station and ordered to disperse, the processionists chose to stay put. All evening they sat on the ground, demanding the right to proceed further, which was refused. Heavy rain came with the night but the processionists did not disperse. In the morning Vallabhbhai, Malaviya, Hansa Mehta, Manibehn and many others were arrested; a brutal lathi charge dispersed the rest.

Patel declined to say anything before a court to which they were brought but the loquacious Malaviya began "a discourse and disquisition". A tired Vallabhbhai interrupted him, saying, "*Kya bhains ke paas Bhaagavat padhte hain?*" – "Does one read the Bhagavat to a buffalo?" "What was that?" the European judge asked. "I was telling him," Vallabhbhai said with a straight face, "that the lathi charge had been ordered by the Home Member who was watching the procession from the VT terrace."⁶⁰

Being arrested in Bombay had one advantage. He was sent not to the prison in Sabarmati but to Yeravda Jail, where Gandhi was being detained. Two weeks after Patel had joined him, the “busybodies”, Sapru and Jayakar, turned up at Yeravda to probe the possibility of peace. By Irwin’s permission, they brought three of the Raj’s North Indian detainees with them: Motilal, Jawaharlal and Bihar’s Syed Mahmud. The two “peace-makers”, the three North Indian prisoners and four Yeravda detainees – the Mahatma, Vallabhbhai, Jairamdas Daulatram and Sarojini Naidu – conferred together. Congress’s terms for a settlement were then taken by Sapru and Jayakar to Irwin, who rejected them.

* * *

Alfred Master, meanwhile, had toughened his approach. First, he advanced the revenue collection date to October 5, which meant that rebelling peasants would forfeit their standing crop. If the Raj waited for the customary date, the peasants would harvest the crop, sell it and remove the money to Baroda. Next, Master gave free rein to a man who offered to break the resistance, the new Mamlatdar of Borsad, Mohanlal Shah. Touring the taluka with a lorry-load of policemen, Shah broke open houses, ordered the thrashing of men with white caps, beat up some men himself and authorized the snatching of ornaments from the peasants’ bodies. Surprising a village by arriving before dawn, Shah would carry off to an improvised prison anyone suspected of being a local leader.

Shah’s zulum triggered hijrat, or migration, to Baroda territory. Terror or intimidation was tried elsewhere too. It produced, in addition to migrants from Borsad, hijratis from Kheda’s Nadiad taluka, Surat’s Bardoli and Jalalpur talukas and Broach’s Jambusar taluka. In February 1931, Baroda officials counted about 28,000 hijratis from the three districts. Living in huts built from branches and leaves, giving names such as “Sardar Nagar”, “Satya Nagar” and “Jawahar Nagar” to their camps, these hijratis constituted a conspicuous element of the 1930-31 struggle.

Master’s third step was to announce that Patidar lands would be sold to Baraiyas and Patanvadiyas.⁶¹ Mohanlal Shah, who may have sold this tactic to Master, was asked to implement it. He did not beat about the bush. On September 20 he told the poor peasants of Asodar village:

Those who took away your lands during the great famine of 1899-1900 now pose as servants of the people. I have now come to offer you back your land for five seers of corn. I can give you ten

*bighas of land with standing crops for ten rupees. I can give police protection so that you can harvest the crops safely.*⁶²

In December he said:

*Those who want mukhiships, Patidar lands with standing crops and Patidar houses, come to me....I was born to emancipate the Baraiyas and Patanvadiyas.*⁶³

Non-Patidars were incited to "loot the empty houses of Patidar hijratis, to plunder their crop from their fields, and even to burn down their houses". About fifty houses were burnt down in seventeen different villages. Despite his ingenuity and audacity, Shah met with only partial success. In September, after Shah had visited Bochasan village, where he "took off his topi and placed two annas before the goddess worshipped by the Baraiyas", and also told the Baraiyas that they were the original rulers of the area, a Baraiya supporter of Congress called Bhavanjibhai Parmar frustrated Shah's effort. Parmar convened a meeting of Baraiyas of 17 nearby villages where it was decided to boycott Baraiyas who bought land confiscated from Patidars. In the following month Shah told the Patanvadiyas of Rupaiapura village that they should buy the lands of the Patidars who had gone to Baroda territory. Their reply was that even if he gave the land free, they would not take it.⁶⁴ Ravishankar Maharaj had worked amongst the Patanvadiyas of Rupaiapura, and they were not prepared to let him down.

Of the 51 villages in Borsad taluka in which revenue was refused, 36 were Patidar-dominated, but 11 were Baraiya-dominated. Muslims were the principal community in one, Brahmins in another, Vaniyas in a third, and Patanvadiyas in a fourth. Thus revenue refusal was largely but not exclusively a Patidar phenomenon. One or two villages fulfilled Shah's wishes. In Khanpur, not far from Ras, five houses of leading Patidar hijratis were burnt by Baraiyas incited by revenue officials. As a result, the Patidars returned and paid up. Elsewhere, however, "the hijratis stood firm while their crops were cut and their houses were looted and burnt".⁶⁵ By 15th March 1931, after counting the "gains" from Master's measures and Shah's methods, the Raj had only collected 40 per cent of the revenue due from Borsad taluka. In Bardoli the percentage was lower still.

In Kheda, 67 organizations connected with Congress were banned and 17 Congress buildings occupied by the police. Vallabhbhai's parental home in Karamsad, occupied by Ladba and her eldest and youngest sons, Somabhai and Kashibhai, was raided for the recovery of revenue dues. The 83-year-old Ladba was cooking when policemen entered her house, arrested Kashibhai, picked up utensils and filled

them with stones, sand and kerosene. Older villagers stopped Karamsad's enraged youngsters from venting their anger in violence. Hearing of some of the events, Vallabhbhai wrote to Manibehn from Yeravda Jail:

6.9.30: I would like you to go from village to village in Kheda district and encourage our people.... It is good that Kashi Kaka has been taken away to jail. A little experience of that kind will be valuable to him. You must try and go again to see Ba (Ladba).⁶⁶

Soon Manibehn was rearrested and lodged in Sabarmati Jail.

To Manibehn, 13.10.30: Look after all the other women prisoners and see that they come out braver than when they went in.... I am spinning in right earnest. Daily I spin 2,000 yards.⁶⁷

Early in November Patel was released from Yeravda. He started at once to lash out. His speeches were rousing, and the Raj ordered him to desist from making any more. Vallabhbhai thought he would heed the order for a while and spend time among his peasants. However, he was unable to stay silent while opening a new khadi store in Bombay.

You can scarcely be unaware of my innermost wishes and ideas and no one on earth can prevent you from listening to these. Even if I am behind bars you will have access to them....

Some tell me that I am ruining the farmer of Gujarat.... I would say that if he allows himself to be destroyed in the course of this struggle, he will have made an appropriate contribution to the great sacrificial fire lit for the freedom of this country.

Peasants in Karnataka were also refusing revenue, and Patel referred to them:

In Karnataka too confiscations have begun and many a farmer has gone to jail.... Many have been completely ruined. I can but offer them praise from the bottom of my heart when I hear tales of their bravery and sacrifice.⁶⁸

His transgression was noted by the Raj but action was withheld. He was allowed to go to Ahmedabad, where, having relinquished his own residence, he stayed with the Kanugas. Once more, however, his freedom was brief. In the second week of December, less than five weeks after his release, he was rearrested. His khadi store speech was held against him, but what caused the Raj to act were his meetings

with peasants and the encouragement he was giving to picketers of liquor and foreign-cloth shops. Awarded a nine-month sentence, Vallabhbhai was removed to Yeravda. Before that, exercising a right vested in him, he had named Rajendra Prasad acting President of Congress.

* * *

Alfred Master believed that "firm rule made for a happier people"⁶⁹ and his boss Joseph Garrett agreed with him, but other outlooks also existed within the Raj. In December 1930, Frank Hudson, Bombay's Revenue Member, visited Borsad taluka, met some hijratis of Ras and Bochasan and saw the stubbornness that repression had invited. As a result, Mohanlal Shah was replaced by Solomon Benjamin, the Mamlatdar of Mehemdabad and a critic of Shah's methods, and plans were made to transfer Master as well.

At a higher level, Irwin declared in Calcutta in December that it would be "a profound mistake" to "underestimate the meaning of nationalism", which, he added, could "never" be wholly cured by "strong action by the Government".⁷⁰ Though the Round Table Conference boycotted by Congress met in London from November 1930 to January 1931, the Prime Minister, Ramsay MacDonald, admitted its unrepresentative character and adjourned it. Sapru and Jayakar had attended the London conference. So had Srinivasa Sastri. In a cable to Motilal Nehru, who was now out of prison, the three urged Congress to await their return before making its next move. Within days – on January 26, 1931, exactly a year after their independence pledge in Lahore – Gandhi, Patel, Jawaharlal and other WorCom members were unconditionally released.

"I have come out of jail unfettered by enmity," Gandhi declared.⁷¹ He asked for "a heart-to-heart" talk with the Viceroy; Irwin agreed, and on February 17 their parleys started. Between the leaders' release and the Gandhi-Irwin talks, however, Motilal Nehru had passed away. Proceeding together to Allahabad the day after their release, Vallabhbhai and the Mahatma had seen him on his deathbed.

Lasting from February 17 to March 4, the Gandhi-Irwin talks were held at the Indian Viceroy's new mansion, designed by Lutyens. The palace of red sandstone reflected the Raj's grandeur and suggested permanence, but Winston Churchill, MP, expressed his famous alarm that Gandhi was "striding up the steps of the viceregal palace to parley on equal terms with the representative of the King-Emperor" while still conducting "a defiant campaign of civil disobedience". What stuck in Churchill's throat was delectable to India: the empire was finally sitting down to talk with the nation's representative.

The WorCom camped in Delhi for the duration. Walking five miles to the palace and another five miles back to the residence of his host, Dr Mukhtar Ahmed Ansari, Gandhi gave a daily, or nightly, account of the talks to Jawaharlal, Patel and the others and sought the WorCom's counsel at every important juncture. Sapru, Jayakar and Sastri – Vallabhbhai's "busybodies" – were also at hand but Patel himself was absent for part of the time. The peasants of Gujarat wanted him at their side.

In the end an accord was reached. Gandhi agreed to call off disobedience and the Raj agreed to release satyagrahi prisoners, withdraw the ordinances, return unsold confiscated lands, allow residents of coastal areas to collect their own salt and permit unaggressive picketing. The Raj also undertook to "pursue a liberal policy" in regard to the reappointment of resigning mukhis, and to take into account a peasant's ability to pay before recovering revenue. Independence was nowhere conceded and even the salt tax was not withdrawn, but the accord gave Congress the peace it needed after ten months of struggle and also enhanced its prestige. By signing a Pact with Gandhi, the Viceroy had recognized Congress as *the* representative of the Indian people. Though not comprehensive, the salt and picketing concessions laid down in the Pact meant that in some areas Congressmen and their sympathizers could freely collect salt; and they could picket, with impunity, liquor shops, selling foreign cloth "under the eye of the very policeman who was till yesterday jumping upon them like a wolf on a fold".⁷² The grassroots Congressman was thus strengthened in his dealings with local officials, a development the latter resented.

These implications were well realized by Vallabhbhai, but he was heartbroken at Gandhi's failure to obtain the restoration of sold lands. The Mahatma had told Irwin that negotiations would break down if sold lands were not to be returned, to which Irwin's reply was that he was bound by the pledge against restoration given to the Bombay Government. Yet Patel too had made a promise: the peasants had been assured by him that their lands would return "knocking on their doors". Gandhi informed Irwin that any settlement on lands not acceptable to Vallabhbhai would not be acceptable to him either. The stalemate was overcome by a compromise that hurt Patel more than the Raj. Gandhi and Irwin agreed that "where immovable property has been sold to third parties, the transaction must be regarded as final, so far as the Government are concerned".⁷³ The qualifying phrase left a margin for non-governmental efforts for the return of sold lands; and Irwin was willing to urge the Bombay Government to help these efforts.

The concessions did not satisfy Vallabhbhai, but his loyalty to the Mahatma prevented him from advising a break. Jawaharlal was

similarly dissatisfied with a clause of the accord that committed Congress to "consider further the constitutional scheme discussed at the Round Table Conference"; and almost all WorCom members were unhappy at the Raj's unwillingness to assure the release of non-satyagrahi prisoners. However, as the Congress historian has well put it, "if everybody were satisfied on every question, it would not be a settlement but a victory to the Congress".⁷⁴ The Mahatma, to quote Sitaramayya again, "put it to member after member of the Working Committee, individually, and asked whether he should break on prisoners, on lands, on anything, on everything...."⁷⁵ No one was prepared to counsel a break.

On his side, Irwin told Gandhi that Churchill was likely to accuse him of betraying Britain.⁷⁶ He was right. Churchill lamented that "the lawless act has now been made lawful", that "Mr Gandhi and Congress have been raised to a towering pedestal" and that appeasement had been offered to those who had "inflicted such humiliation and defiance as has not been known since the British first trod the soil of India".⁷⁷

Gujarat's peasants were, however, miserable at the failure over sold lands. The young all over India were unhappy that the amnesty did not cover all political prisoners. Thus the Pact did not provide for the release of many Bengali youths who had gone to jail before Gandhi launched his satyagraha. The death sentence that three young men, Bhagat Singh, Sukhdev and Rajguru, had received for the murder of a Punjab official was not altered by the Gandhi-Irwin parleys, and this was an additional reason for disappointment. Taken as a whole, however, the people of India were thrilled by the Pact, for it acknowledged India's equality with Britain and unveiled the possibility of Swaraj through negotiation. In Gandhi's measured words, Congress was "deliberately though provisionally" embarking on "a career of cooperation", and the Mahatma also spoke of "a second door to Swaraj" opened by the Pact.⁷⁸ He would try to go through that door by taking part in the next round of the Round Table Conference. A Press conference on March 6, when Indian, British and American journalists talked with Gandhi, exuded expectancy.

Journalist: Will you press for Purna Swaraj (complete independence) at the Round Table Conference? Gandhi: We will deny our very existence if we do not press for it. J.: What was that which turned the tide in the negotiations? G. (smiling): Goodness on the part of Lord Irwin and perhaps (a bigger smile on Gandhi) equal goodness on my part as well. J.: Do you expect to achieve Purna Swaraj in your life time? G.: I do look for it most decidedly. I still consider myself a young man of 62.

*J.: Do you prefer the English people as a governing race to other races? G.: I have no choice to make. I do not want to be governed but by myself. J.: Would you agree to become the Prime Minister of the future Government? G.: No. It will be reserved for younger minds and stouter hands.*⁷⁹

Was Gandhi thinking of anyone in particular when he made that last remark? Jawaharlal? Vallabhbhai? The question must have crossed many minds, including those of Patel and Jawahar, but the Prime Ministership of India was not a topic on which realistic individuals spent much time in 1931. The immediate question was that of the next Congress President. The WorCom went into it at the end of February, before the Pact was reached. In view of the fact that a large number of Congressmen were still in prison, the procedure whereby provincial committees proposed names was put aside, and the burden of picking Jawaharlal's successor was shouldered by the WorCom itself.

Aided by the Mahatma's advice, it chose Vallabhbhai. He had earned the honour in 1928, was proposed for it in 1929 and had earned it again in 1930. Gujarat's 1930 defiance, not equalled in breadth or persistence by any other state, was essentially his achievement, even though he was incarcerated for half the year. He was the obvious choice in any case, yet Gandhi may have also hoped that Patel's assumption of the Presidency would soothe the Gujarat peasantry, and that the office would strengthen Vallabhbhai vis-a-vis the Bombay Government.

There was joy within and outside Gujarat at the appointment but one man was deeply hurt – by extraordinary and painful irony, a person particularly close to Vallabhbhai. Following his resignation as President of the Assembly, Vithalbhai had coveted Congress's throne. He was not unmindful, of course, of Vallabhbhai's qualifications for the office, but hope had entered his mind before Vallabhbhai's name was announced, and friends of his had started probing the ground. Viewing his brother's appointment as "the unkindest cut of all" and perceiving in it an "implied humiliation", Vithalbhai decided to leave India for a surgery that might otherwise have taken place within the country.⁸⁰ Vithalbhai's biographer, devoted to his subject, insinuates that the decision to let the WorCom rather than the PCCs choose the 1931 President was a device to thwart Vithalbhai. There is in this suggestion a great overestimation of Vithalbhai's hold on the Congress of 1931, a corresponding underestimation of the demand for Vallabhbhai, and a complete disregard of the difficulty at the time of obtaining the views of the PCCs. Though, therefore, the insinuation is groundless, we may concede this much, that left to himself Vallabhbhai might have yielded the Presidency to the older brother.

But he was not by himself. Gandhi was at his elbow, another "elder brother" with clear ideas.

* * *

The Pact signed, the Mahatma and Vallabhbhai toured the Borsad and Bardoli talukas. Said Gandhi to the peasants:

*In so far as your lands are concerned, you must get them back.... Although I had not given any such promise, Sardar Vallabhbhai had done so. When you will get them back, and in what manner, I cannot say, but that they will be restored to you is a certainty.... As long as the lands are not returned to you, we shall not rest in peace.*⁸¹

Congress's Karachi session would follow, Vallabhbhai presiding. He and Gandhi left Gujarat together for Delhi en route to Karachi. In Delhi the Mahatma tried once more to save the lives of Bhagat Singh, Rajguru and Sukhdev, telling Irwin that "our Pact would be destroyed" if the hangings, scheduled for March 23, took place.⁸² The plea was turned down and the three young men were hanged while Gandhi and Patel were on the train to Karachi. They were greeted at Karachi station by young men incensed by the hangings who shouted slogans against Gandhi and presented him and Patel with black flowers. "I thank you," Gandhi told them, "for handing the flowers instead of throwing them at us."⁸³

In "an extremely short"⁸⁴ Presidential speech – an extremely rare phenomenon in Congress's history –, Vallabhbhai began with a reference to the honour he had received: "You have called a simple farmer to the highest office to which any Indian can aspire."⁸⁵ We have seen this self-description before. It is strikingly modest but incorrect. Patel was the son of a farmer; he knew a farmer's life and had fought for peasants' rights; but he was more a lawyer and a warrior than a farmer. Yet the expression was no artifice, and its inexactitude sprang from modesty and filial loyalty and also from a consciousness that, barristership and all, he had missed the university life that Jawahar, C.R., Rajendra Prasad and several other colleagues of his had experienced. This consciousness can be discerned in more than one utterance of Vallabhbhai's. In 1930, for instance, after accepting the presidency of a National Hindi Conference, he had said: "The rest of you will need to study in order to become President; I became one without studying." On another occasion he remarked that the industrialist Mafatlal Gagalbhai had "collected his millions despite his being a fourth-form boy like me".⁸⁶

We should return, however, to the Karachi address. Patel referred to the execution of Bhagat Singh, Rajguru and Sukhdev, the Pact and the London conference:

I cannot identify myself with their methods... Political murder is no less reprehensible than any other, but the patriotism, daring and sacrifice of Bhagat Singh and his comrades command my admiration. The heartless and foreign nature of the Government was never more strikingly demonstrated than in their determination to carry out the execution....

Had we not accepted the settlement, we should have put ourselves in the wrong.... The Working Committee thought that if an honourable truce could be arranged,... the Congress should, if invited, take part in the Conference and attempt to reach an agreed solution to the constitutional issue. If we fail in the attempt, the path of struggle is there for us to follow.⁸⁷

Despite the reservations over the Pact, Jawaharlal, the retiring President, moved the resolution for its ratification. Despite his stronger reservations, Subhas Bose, let out of prison six weeks after the other leaders, supported the resolution. Gandhi and Patel had assured him that they would work for the release of the Bengal prisoners. The Mahatma explained his position to the Karachi session:

I am under no illusion that by attending the Round Table Conference we shall achieve Complete Independence. I too have my doubts and often wonder what we shall be able to gain by attending it.

But... it is imperative in any satyagraha that whenever there is an opportunity for convincing our opponent by discussion, that opportunity should be taken.⁸⁸

Notable for the unity displayed by Gandhi, Patel, Nehru and Bose, the Karachi session is also significant for its resolution on fundamental rights. Drafted in the main by Jawaharlal and revised in the light of changes proposed by the Mahatma, the resolution committed Congress to specific reforms in a free India. They included freedom of expression, religion, thought and assembly; equality regardless of caste, sex or creed; a minimum wage and limited working hours; a secular state; the abolition of untouchability and of serfdom; and state ownership or control of key industries and services. Since Vallabhbhai felt that certain words in the fundamental rights resolution were ambiguous, the AICC was authorized to rephrase it. In August the resolution was given its final form. The new wording

made it clear that Congress did not intend any wholesale expropriation of property.

Salty remarks from Patel concluded the Karachi session. They were aimed at young radicals impatient with Congress's moderation.

Gandhiji is now almost 63 years old. I am 56. Should we, the old, be anxious for independence, or you, the young? We are interested in seeing India independent before we die. We are far more in a hurry than you.

If six months hence the time comes again, I shall show once more what is possible. Why are you agitated? You are not going to be old after six months.

You talk of peasants and workers. I claim I have become old in the service of peasants. I am willing to be compared with anyone of you. Hardly anyone of you could have made the peasants sacrifice themselves and their property so much as I have.

Does one hunt goats? Zamindars are miserable creatures. Any minion of the Government can frighten them.... Let us act in such a way that they throw in their lot, for good or evil, with the people. Obviously, it is not right that the Zamindars should waste their money on eating, drinking and dancing while the peasants, whom they should regard as their children, starve outside.⁸⁹

* * *

Patel and the Mahatma returned to Gujarat. While Gandhi urged the Bombay officials to heed Irwin's advice and pursue a liberal policy in restoring lands and mukhiships, Vallabhbhai exhorted action by the peasants, including the boycott of those who had paid revenue during the struggle, bought confiscated land or taken up resigned mukhiships. The Pact was only a truce, Patel insisted. "Within months the struggle would be resumed," he said.⁹⁰ Vallabhbhai's belief that he understood the peasants better than Gandhi is brought out in his remarks to a group of Bardoli hijratis in the Mahatma's presence:

Gandhi would spin and talk to you. But there is not much new in what he can tell you. In any case, what would you, farmers, understand of what he has to say? Therefore, you listen only to me. I have learnt whatever there was to learn from him, and you must learn in turn from me.⁹¹

The outlook of Irwin, who, in Gandhi's words, had been "determined, if at all possible, to have a settlement",⁹² did not seep

down to ground level. Men like Garrett and Master felt that the Delhi talks had given the Congress far too much prestige, and they opposed the betrayal of Indian loyalists who, defying Congress, had bought seized lands or accepted vacated mukhiships. Gandhi complained to Irwin about the rigidity of Master, who was replaced on April 7 by a temporary Collector, E. W. Perry, "a younger officer who had some sympathy for the Congress".⁹³

After April 18, however, there was no Irwin to go to. He had been replaced by Lord Willingdon, former Governor of Bombay and Madras, who completely distrusted Gandhi and believed that "Irwin was a simple man who was deluded" by the Mahatma.⁹⁴ With Willingdon at the helm, officials in Gujarat and elsewhere felt no obligation to be "liberal". Three days after Irwin's departure, Garrett told the Mahatma that Congress could not be regarded "as a mediator between the Government and the people".⁹⁵ In the U.P., Congressmen espousing peasant grievances were kept at arm's length and accused of sponsoring civil disobedience in disguise.

The Collector of Madras, A. R. Cox, assailed picketing, which the Pact had legitimized, and the Chief Secretary of Madras "seemed determined", in C.R.'s words, "to push down all representations from Congress to the district magistrates".⁹⁶ The success of picketing displeased officials. A single volunteer could stop sales merely by standing, national flag in hand, near a shop. Prevented by the Pact from prohibiting pickets at liquor stalls, the Government of Madras banned picketing at auctions of liquor-stall licences, which was a breach of the spirit of the pact.

The Madras officials' attitude was understandable: picketing was hurting the Government's revenue from liquor sales, which really meant that Congress was hurting the Raj. Willingdon and a majority of the bureaucracy did not accept a corollary of Irwin's Pact with Gandhi, which was that the Raj should gradually wane and Congress correspondingly wax. From the North West Frontier came reports of torture: villagers who had not paid revenue were herded into a room filled with wasps, and two Khudai Khidmatgar volunteers were stripped naked and beaten.

Though concerned, as Congress President, with events anywhere in the land, Patel spent most of his energies in a bid to redeem his promise to Gujarat's peasants. He and the Mahatma shared the effort, with Vallabhbhai camping in Bardoli taluka and Gandhi in Borsad. The two asked the peasants to pay the revenue they had withheld, the Raj to return the lands it had seized and third parties owning seized lands to restore them to original owners. Patel was less successful in Bardoli than Gandhi in Borsad in the restoration of sold lands. By April 30, of the 1792 acres confiscated in Kheda district, all except 72 had been returned.⁹⁷ In Bardoli, Irwin's advice that officials should

assist the effort for restoration was ignored. Worse, "incitement was offered to resist negotiations".⁹⁸

Though bitter and resentful, the peasants listened to Vallabhbhai and the Mahatma and paid up. By July, thanks to Patel's exertions, Bardoli had paid 19 lakhs out of the 20 lakhs it owed, and Borsad's response to Gandhi was just as good. Their success with the Government was nowhere near as complete. Perry, Master's successor as Collector of Kheda, did indeed give the Mahatma every cooperation. All but four of the mukhis whose reinstatement Gandhi asked for were back in their jobs, and when Gandhi submitted lists of peasants unable to afford revenue, Perry suspended revenue collection in most cases. On May 3, Perry cancelled all the confiscation notices issued in 33 villages of Borsad taluka, and promised that no fresh notices would be issued without Gandhi and the local Congress being informed.

This was encouraging even though it meant that within weeks of conferring with the Viceroy, Gandhi was having to pay court to the Collector of Kheda. To his south, Vallabhbhai, the President of Congress, was knocking on the door of the Collector of Surat. Even mamlatdars of talukas had to be approached. In June the Raj stiffened. Perry was replaced in Kheda by an Indian officer, K. B. Bhadrapur, "a hardline supporter of the policy of repression".⁹⁹ Though admitting to his superiors that revenue collection had been satisfactory, Bhadrapur started confiscating movable property without informing Gandhi.

The Raj's officials successfully defied Patel and the Mahatma over the mukhiship of Ras, which had been given to a Baraiya previously convicted of theft after the Patidar mukhi resigned in the course of the 1930 struggle. Perry had told Gandhi, in line with the liberality enjoined by the Pact, that the Patidar would be reinstated.¹⁰⁰ Later, however, after Perry's transfer, the Raj "remembered" that an assurance of permanency had been given to the Baraiya appointee by a tahsildar, who unfortunately – so Vallabhbhai was informed by the Bombay Government – forgot to tell the Collector!¹⁰¹ The truth was that the Raj wanted to punish the Patidars of Ras for their impenitent attitude. The Baraiya mukhi connived at the cutting down of the trees and hedges of his Patidar predecessor and at the harassment of Ras's Patidars "in a variety of petty ways".¹⁰²

The Surat Collector, meanwhile, was bypassing Vallabhbhai, even though Patel had helped towards recovering 95 per cent of the revenue due. Policemen and revenue officers besieged the houses of peasants who still owed money, hurled abuse at inmates and declared that people or cattle would be allowed out only after dues were paid. Arrears were recovered from 16 villages in this illegal way, illegal because the use of police was not sanctioned by the land revenue code.

An infuriated Vallabhbhai fired off one telegram after another to Gandhi, who had gone to Simla to talk with Willingdon. In the first wire Patel described a raid on one village and said that peasants were finding themselves "between the devil and the deep sea". In the second he reported, "Police parties raided several villages today". In the third he referred to police breaking open the backdoor of a Muslim villager's house. Finally, in his fourth telegram, after speaking of "intolerable police persecution", Vallabhbhai said: "For God's sake allow fight if this cannot be stopped."¹⁰³

He was an enraged lion in a cage: angered by the Raj and caged by Gandhi's firm instructions that "whatever the local officers may do", the peasants should not hit back.¹⁰⁴ As far as Vallabhbhai was concerned, the Raj had violated the accord and a reaction was called for. An earlier discussion between him and the Mahatma, recorded by the faithful Mahadev, reveals the tension affecting them:

Seeing the Sardar very annoyed, Bapu remarked, "If we want to break on this we can of course do so." The Sardar: "What is the point of breaking now? Half the peasants have already paid...The remainder will also pay. We do not appear to be giving any definite guidance to the people." Bapu: "How do you say that?" The Sardar: "It is not clear guidance to say that anybody who can pay should pay."

Bapu: "But how can we also tell those who are able to pay not to pay?" The Sardar: "We do know that there are a number of people who cannot pay. Through fear, everybody may pay up, no matter the cost."

Later in the day the Sardar had occasion again to protest, and this time Gandhiji too appeared to be hurt: "Do you mean then," he exclaimed, "that I entered into this settlement in spite of you, or disregarding your objections?" To this the Sardar replied equally stiffly: "Is it then my fault that I did not tell you to break?"¹⁰⁵

This was one of the rare occasions when Vallabhbhai and Gandhi snapped at each other, but there was no question of a split. The Mahatma might break with the Raj, or Patel with the peasants, but not the two with each other. Hastening to Gujarat following the spate of telegrams from Vallabhbhai, the Mahatma informed the Raj that if the Bardoli illegalities were not redressed or impartially inquired into, he would regard the settlement "as having been broken by the Government". He and Congress would then be "free to take such action as may be necessary". To this the Bombay Governor replied that he was "satisfied that no breach of the settlement was involved...in Bardoli".¹⁰⁶ The Governor of the U.P. was similarly unmoved by a plea from the Mahatma on behalf

of that province's tenant farmers. Gandhi's response was to announce that he was unable, in the circumstances, to go to the London conference.

The spirit of the Pact was dead. Swaraj through negotiations had proved a false hope. So it seemed, anyway. Not, however, to Patel's "busybodies". Sapru and Jayakar busied themselves in a last-minute bid to restore Gandhi's presence in London. At the end of August, Vallabhbhai, Jawaharlal, Ghaffar Khan and the Mahatma found themselves in Simla where Gandhi again met Willingdon. The Raj wanted Gandhi in London but not at any price. In talks "bereft of all grace",¹⁰⁷ Willingdon rejected every demand of Gandhi save one. He would do nothing about the U.P., nothing about the N.W.F.P. and nothing about the Bengal prisoners. No, Ansari could not go to London – Gandhi had wanted the nationalist Muslim at the conference as a counter to the charge that Congress spoke only for the Hindus, and Irwin had agreed to the proposal, but Willingdon vetoed it. All he could offer, said the Viceroy, was an inquiry into the Bardoli allegations. Having obtained something, be it ever so little, the Mahatma was willing to go to London.

Despite his anger at the Raj, Patel urged Gandhi to proceed, and so did Jawaharlal and Ghaffar Khan. They did not want the Mahatma and Congress accused of going back on their word. The decision to go to London did not mean that faith in the "second door" to Swaraj was intact or that the door of struggle was barred. Before leaving, Gandhi informed the Raj that "notwithstanding the suspension of disobedience", Congress would, if forced, seek relief in "defensive direct action".¹⁰⁸ The Mahatma had come round to Vallabhbhai's view. Marking attendance at the conference was not, however, the only reason for going to London. There was more to Britain than HMG. The people, a separate constituency, could be appealed to.

* * *

As expected, the Round Table Conference failed. The British Press portrayed the Mahatma as a Hindu leader, the Congress as one of several Indian factions. Muslims permitted to take part at the RTC claimed that Gandhi did not speak for them. Neither for us, said the untouchables' leader Ambedkar, who proceeded to demand separate electorates for his people and found receptive British ears. The strategy of Britons of the Willingdon mentality for defeating the nationalist movement was to encourage a separate outlook in three important groups: Muslims, princes and untouchables. The veto against Ansari was an indication that Gandhi had lost, at least for the time being, the battle for the Muslims. But he was determined to prevent the abduction of untouchables and princes from his half.

While taking care not to ruffle the princes unduly, he told the RTC that he would resist separate electorates for untouchables "with my life".

The British found Gandhi strange, determined and likeable. Even in Lancashire, hurt by the Indian boycott, there were cheers for him. To Patel, he wrote: "Most of my work here is done outside the Conference. Although its value for the present is not much, I am inclined to think that it will turn out to be very useful later on." As to the issues Vallabhbhai was facing, Gandhi advised:

At home you do as you like.... If you find that you should offer a fight, offer it by all means.¹⁰⁹

A letter that Patel wrote to C.R. shortly after Gandhi's departure gives an idea of the weight he was carrying and of his humility:

Bapu has gone and I feel so terribly lonely that I don't know what to do. In the absence the burden of carrying on negotiations with Government falls on me and I am so ill-equipped for that kind of work that the burden is too much for me.

I suggested to Bapu that if you could stay with me for the short period of his absence from India, it would be a great relief. He agreed with me, but asked me to write to you about it.¹¹⁰

Unable to leave his province – picketing had spread there, requiring control, and his daughter Namagiri was acutely ill –, C.R. wrote to Vallabhbhai: "Just like the province I am in charge of, my family also has no second-in-command. You must not be angry with me but forgive."¹¹¹

The Bardoli inquiry, conducted by Collector R. Gordon of Nasik, was as fruitless as the RTC. Gordon was supposed to find out whether or not undue force had been employed to collect revenue or undue revenue extorted. Congress was represented at Gordon's inquiry by Bhulabhai Desai, one of the country's ablest advocates. Patel's will to win the 1931 courtroom battle was remembered in Bardoli in 1987 by old V. K. Patel:

It was monsoon time and pouring with rain. 22 witnesses were to come to Bardoli but only 21 turned up. A taluka official had detained one witness. Sardar ordered me to fetch him. "In this rain?" I asked. "Perish but fetch him," said Sardar. Somehow or the other, I brought the witness.¹¹²

However, when Desai asked the court to direct the production of "documents in the possession of the Government in order to confirm or contradict statements by the Government's own witness", Gordon

rejected the plea. Thereupon Desai counselled Congress and the peasants to withdraw from the inquiry. Vallabhbhai, who was finding Gordon's approach "hostile and one-sided",¹¹³ accepted the advice. The Raj's resentment towards Patel showed itself in a letter that S. J. S. Collins, Home Secretary in Bombay, wrote in October 1931 to Emerson in New Delhi:

*The title of "Sardar" which you are using in writing to Mr Vallabhbhai Patel on matters affecting the settlement is not one which he has a right to use. The Sardars of Gujarat are an order created by the Government. They consist of gentlemen, usually large landowners, who have rendered distinguished service.*¹¹⁴

The climate was worsening. Two prisoners were killed and twenty others seriously injured when detainees at Hijli Jail in Bengal were fired upon. The Raj's own inquiry showed that there was no just cause for the firing, yet the British officers in charge of the firing soldiers were exonerated. Some Bengal nationalists took to murder. In revenge a group of Europeans, joined by hoodlums, invaded a printing press in Chittagong, destroying all its machinery, and beat up the workers. For four days Chittagong was ruled by a mafia that the Raj was unwilling or unable to put down. Then, on November 30, Bengal was placed under an ordinance that superseded all laws and codes.

In the U.P., villagers and Congress workers were lathi-charged in Mathura district. When local Congress committees said to peasants in the province that they could withhold revenue until Congress's discussions with the U.P. Government were over, the Government cancelled the talks. Vallabhbhai proposed a compromise to Emerson, Willingdon's Home Secretary: "It ought to be possible for both of us to come to a simple arrangement. Government should postpone its recovery work for a short while, and the Congress should suspend its resolution advising the peasants to refrain from paying the lease money."¹¹⁵ The Raj rejected the plea. When the UPCC sought his sanction for a struggle, Patel advised from experience:

*Before you take the step, you must take full cognizance of all that it implies. The peasants and the workers and their relations will have to endure great hardships. It will also be necessary to maintain a completely non-violent atmosphere. If, after giving full consideration to all these factors, you still feel confident, by all means do take the proposed step.*¹¹⁶

The Raj decided to stamp out any possibility of revenue refusal in the U.P. An ordinance empowered the Government to imprison anyone advising peasants to withhold revenue, to impose a collective

fine on an area where critics of revenue were sheltered, to search or take over any building where propaganda against revenue was being prepared, and so on. It was a comprehensive weapon. A similar ordinance was promulgated in the N.W.F.P. When Ghaffar Khan declared that nothing short of independence would be acceptable to Congress, his utterance was considered an offence against the ordinance. While Gandhi was on the high seas, returning, Ghaffar Khan and his brother Dr Khan Sahib were arrested and a crowd of Khudai Khidmatgars fired upon. According to the Government, 14 were killed, but Verrier Elwin, the anthropologist who sympathized with nationalist hopes, went to the spot and reported that at least 50 had died.

Gandhi had known, before boarding the *Pilsna* for his voyage back, of the Raj's resolve to "crush the Congress". The new Secretary of State for India, Sir Samuel Hoare, had told him as much. Conveying the word to Vallabhbhai, Mahadev wrote: "So you must now make your preparations. We may not be able to meet. You must take such steps as you consider necessary."¹¹⁷ Before the *Pilsna* could arrive in Bombay, Jawaharlal was arrested. News of Jawaharlal's arrest and that of the Khan brothers reached the *Pilsna* but was withheld from the Mahatma. Along with its policies, the Raj's manners had changed.

On December 28 a grim-looking Patel waited for the *Pilsna* at Bombay harbour. He had managed to keep Gujarat in control and given no excuse to the Raj for arresting him. Accompanied by Kasiurba and C.R., he went up the ship when she berthed and gave the Mahatma his news. Immense crowds joined Vallabhbhai in welcoming Gandhi, who told a group of Indians and Britons wanting to avert a clash that "eventually the Government will have to make way for the Congress".¹¹⁸ The WorCom authorized Gandhi to ask for an interview with Willingdon, which he did, informing the Viceroy at the same time that the WorCom had "tentatively sketched out a plan of civil disobedience". Congress, said the Mahatma, condemned "assassination" and "the methods of terrorism" in "unmeasured terms". It would "cooperate heartily with the Government to stamp out such crimes" but it had to resist "measures of legalised Government terrorism".¹¹⁹

To Willingdon this was impudence. On the morning of January 4, Vallabhbhai and the Mahatma were both arrested. Other blows followed. All WorCom members were put behind bars. Congress bodies were banned. Assemblies were prohibited. Leading Congressmen in every town and village were rounded up. Meetings and processions were lathi-charged or fired upon or broken up by mounted policemen. All Congress offices, ashrams and camps were attacked. Press censorship was imposed. All of India came under ordinance rule. There would be peace, Willingdon promised his

admirers, in six weeks. The very name of Congress would be finished, he added. India hit back. Thousands defied the ordinance and the bans. In two months Willingdon had more prisoners than Irwin at the peak of the 1930 struggle.

“It is becoming increasingly difficult to avoid overcrowding the jails,” an Indian servant of the Raj pointed out. A proposal he made to his superiors showed loyalty and resourcefulness: “I think a certain amount of orderly whipping would not be amiss.”¹²⁰ Lashings were not sanctioned but the lathi was used as a cheaper alternative to the lock. Defiers and resisters were beaten in the streets but not always dragged to jail. “No one knows how many were beaten, but the number cannot be less than three or four times the number imprisoned.”¹²¹ If Sitaramayya’s ratio is correct, about three hundred thousand strokes of the lathi were administered by the Raj’s police in January and February 1932.

* * *

Warned by Mahadev and by his own eyes and ears, Patel had made some preparations before he was put away. He had drawn up a list of acting Congress Presidents to succeed him, one after the other: Rajendra Prasad, C.R., Ansari, Saifuddin Kitchlew and Sardul Singh Caveeshar. He had alerted his Gujarat colleagues to expect the worst. On January 4, the day he and the Mahatma were arrested, Ravishankar Maharaj and Ashabhai Patel restarted revenue refusal in Ras. Next day Ashabhai and 14 leading Patidars of Ras were put behind bars, but Baroda’s villages were once again being used – for sheltering Congress offices, producing satyagraha bulletins and launching flag processions into British-controlled villages and “raids” into ashrams seized by the Raj. A day before his arrest, anticipating the seizure of Bardoli’s Swaraj Ashram and its funds, Vallabhbhai signed a bearer cheque for Rs 10,000 against the Ashram’s account in the Surat branch of the Bank of India and posted it to Uttamchand Shah, the Ashram secretary. Shah managed to encash it.¹²²

The other side too had prepared itself. Repression was especially severe in Surat. Congress workers were driven out of their centres, including the Bardoli Ashram, “with only the clothes they had on”.¹²³ Cooperation between the British and Baroda authorities was closer than before and hijrat was denied. When Baroda police found forty hijratis camping on fields in Vishroli, a Baroda village, they tore down their huts and drove them back. By February only six Kheda villages were refusing revenue en masse: five in Borsad and one in Matar taluka. The Raj’s police concentrated on these pockets, peasants were stripped and beaten, but Ras and another Borsad village, Sunav, stood firm.

Breaking the spirit of Ras became a matter of the Raj's prestige. In 1932, as many as 189 residents of Ras were imprisoned and 1,811 acres of land were confiscated, of which 830 acres were sold. In October, 64 extra policemen were imported into Ras to prevent the villagers from harassing the new owners of land. Yet Ras continued to deny revenue, its Patidars subsisting on sales of the khadi they made at home. They were forbidden from going out to the fields; they had no money to marry their daughters; and other villages no longer wanted their sons. Their misery, but also their fortitude, and the weight on Vallabhbhai of his unredeemed word, continued until 1938, when the Forfeited Lands Restoration Act became law under Bombay's first Congress ministry. Unyielding in struggle and fierce in pride, passionately loyal to Vallabhbhai and the Mahatma but disregarding hazards even when the Sardar or Gandhi pointed them out, the men of Ras finally got their lands back.¹²⁴

* * *

Back, however, to January 1932. Arrested under Regulation 25 of 1827, which permitted detention without trial and with no fixed sentence, Gandhi and Patel were taken by car to Yeravda. The Mahatma would be released in the summer of 1933 but Vallabhbhai remained behind bars until July 1934, i.e., for over 30 months. Two months after being brought to Yeravda, Gandhi and Patel were joined by Mahadev, who was transferred from Nasik Jail. In April, a sum of Rs 400 a year was sanctioned for the dependants of the Mahatma and Vallabhbhai. This was law, not charity. The grant had not been asked for, and the "facts" that determined the quantum were questionable. "Mr Patel is, as far as I am aware," a senior functionary noted in the file on the subject, "a widower with no children."¹²⁵

Shortly after Mahadev's arrival, the Commissioner of the Poona division, a Briton, called at Yeravda and said: "The Government have kept you three best brains together. It shows their great confidence in you."¹²⁶ His remark was condescending, yet the Commissioner was right in assigning significance to the fact that Gandhi, Vallabhbhai and Mahadev were together. Mahadev's arrival did not influence the course of politics but it ensured a record for the future.

This Boswell had two Johnsons. His Yeravda Diary does not do equal justice to them. Of one he was a bondsman by choice, of the other only a devoted fan. Desirous of capturing the Mahatma's life, and aware that in prison he had an opportunity he would not get outside, Mahadev probed and cross-examined his master at every turn. His Diary is therefore filled with explanations and amplifications of Gandhi's views and with episodes from Gandhi's past. Neither the past nor the mind of Vallabhbhai is subjected to a similar scrutiny.

Even so the Diary brings him to life as almost nothing else does, and we will quote several excerpts from it.

This time newspapers are permitted in prison. Patel reads them avidly, closely, completely. Often Mahadev is spinning while Vallabhbhai reads them. Asked by Mahadev for the "news in a nutshell", Patel would say: " 'The Collector Kheda at a Muslim Conference,' 'Samuel Hoare playing tennis,' " and so on. (23.4.32) At other times Vallabhbhai read items aloud more fully, for the benefit of both Gandhi and Mahadev.

Mahadev's diary, 24.3.32: Arogyaswami was spelt in some paper as Arokiaswami. Vallabhbhai read it as Arokia and I laughed. At this he was angry and said, "You may laugh as loudly as you please, but I can only read what the newspaperman has written."

The three would discuss the meaning of a piece of news and the motives of the individuals involved, as when they received a request for advice from Sarojini Naidu, who was not among the arrested. Through a visitor to Yeravda, whose name Mahadev does not supply, Sarojini sent word that she had been invited to Simla, presumably for informal negotiations, and asked whether she should go. Gandhi refused to be drawn out, but Patel asked Dahyabhai, who was permitted to see his father once a fortnight, "to tell her not to go". (19.3.32) In April the trio learnt that Malaviya intended to hold a Congress session in Delhi. A bold move to defy the ban? Or a retreat from struggle and towards peace with the Raj?

Mahadev's diary, 6.4.32: The Sardar is anxious about the Congress session proposed to be held in Delhi. He said: "It will distract the people's attention for nothing and lead them to neglect essential tasks.... On the whole this move will only do us harm." Bapu replied: "I do not think so.... A few people will be arrested and it will be a good thing if Malaviyaji is one of them."

On April 24 the news came that "both Malaviyaji and Sarojini have been arrested". Early in May, however, Malaviya was released, and Patel tried to assess what this meant.

Mahadev's diary, 3.5.32: Since yesterday Vallabhbhai must have remarked several times to me and to Bapu, "So Malaviyaji is released." Whenever we get any news of this nature, this is Vallabhbhai's way of showing that he is puzzled and cogitating over the news. He must have pondered over this news the whole of today. Before he went to bed he again remarked, "So Malaviyaji was released within eight days."

As this vignette suggests, the political struggle engages Patel more or less completely. The Mahatma, on the other hand, would write scores of letters a day on religion, nature cure, fasting, control over sex, or something else. His "cogitation" more obvious than Gandhi's, Vallabhbhai is also more suspicious than Gandhi of allies like Malaviya who maintain some links with the Raj. In addition, Patel is less inclined than Gandhi or Mahadev to take visiting or jail officials at their face value, and more ready to amuse himself at their expense.

Mahadev's diary, 23.3.32: Vallabhbhai makes fun of the [prison] Superintendent but Bapu would say, "No, sir, you do him an injustice. He is not at fault. He is doing his best."

Mahadev would see "wonderful gentleness" (31.5.32) on the face of Maclochlan, the Collector of Poona, but Patel was not prepared to waste charity on the Raj's representatives. "They are one and all lost to all sense of shame," he said to Gandhi, "and you will come round to my view by and by." (29.4.32) When he found a speech by Irwin in which the former Viceroy defended his successor, Vallabhbhai told the Mahatma, "See how your friend is behaving himself." (30.4.32) On another occasion Patel spoke of Gandhi's time at the RTC as "the months you wasted in that country". (11.4.32) Much of this was banter, of course, yet also indicative of the offence the Raj had given to the proud Patidar.

A Miss Lumsden wrote to Gandhi from Canada that a recent house guest of hers, Sir Henry Lawrence, had recalled an interview he had had ten years earlier with Gandhi during the Mahatma's first imprisonment in Yeravda. According to Lawrence, Miss Lumsden continued, Gandhi then had "rooms looking out on a lovely orchard". If she didn't believe him, Lawrence had added, Gandhi would confirm the account, "unless", – so Lawrence had apparently said to the Canadian lady –, "Mr Gandhi's memory is failing, for you must remember that he is 62".

Mahadev's diary, 30.5.32: Bapu dictated a reply to her letter. I remarked that on reading the reply one might get the impression that Bapu was doubting Sir Henry's truthfulness. Bapu replied that the draft must be changed if such was the case, for he had no intention of calling Lawrence untruthful. The Sardar said: "Lawrence is doing propaganda. I suggest you write to this lady that here in this jail there are no gardens but only prisoners, and that Sir Henry may well be afraid of his failing memory, for after all he is older than myself."

I said that Bernard Shaw would certainly give such a reply, but

Bapu's reply should not appear to be clever. At this Vallabhbhai became rather angry. In any case, Bapu dictated a fresh letter.

Like Mahadev, we too can detect a Shavian flavour in some of Patel's Yeravda repartees:

29.4.32: I remarked that the letter (to Gandhi) written by Irwin when Maganlalbhai died is unforgettable. Vallabhbhai: "Mahadev, if you give up the struggle they will all write nice letters to you, just as Sikhs would like you much more if you started keeping long hair!"

31.5.32: Today's post brought a rather silly letter. The writer asks Bapu: "How can a man weighing three maunds avoid crushing ants when he walks on this earth?" Vallabhbhai immediately remarked, "Tell him that he should walk with his feet on his head."

24.11.32: One correspondent had written that he did not like his wife who was ugly. Vallabhbhai immediately advised Bapu to tell him to blind himself and thereafter live happily with his wife. Another correspondent, who was desirous of marrying again, said that he was under an obligation to a man who had three daughters all of whom were unmarried, and the father was pressing him to marry one of them, as there was a shortage of young men in their community. Vallabhbhai's suggestion was that he should marry all three girls!

24.11.32: Today, there was an open letter from a correspondent who signed himself as "one who had the misfortune of living in your (Bapu's) age." Bapu: "Tell me, what sort of reply should I send him?" Vallabhbhai: "Tell him to poison himself." Bapu: "Would it not be better to say that he should poison me?" Vallabhbhai: "I am afraid that will not help him. If he poisons you and you die, he would be sentenced to death. Then he would take his chance of rebirth along with you. It is much better that he poisons himself."

But the man with the malicious wit was also a son of Kheda's rural soil:

27.2.33: In today's Bombay Chronicle it is stated that the Government have decided not to release prisoners until 1935, and that Gandhiji would be kept in jail for at least 3 years. Bapu: "Look, was I not saying that I would be in jail for five years?" Vallabhbhai (dryly): "You are behaving like the thick-skinned person who was told that a babul tree was growing on his back. He replied, 'Excellent, it will now give me shade.' "

A third variety of humour, homely yet irresistible, is suggested by this entry:

13.3.32: *Bapu wants a pinch of soda to be added to nearly every article of food. So whenever there is any difficulty, Vallabhbhai says, "Add a pinch of soda and all will be well."*

There were other times when humour was an outlet for a wounded spirit. Reading early in April that some "cultivators of Bardoli had paid their taxes, apologized for previous non-payment, garlanded the Commissioner and cried, 'Sarkar ki Jai!'", Patel said to Gandhi: "Let us write to the Government that now that they have won a victory there is no need to keep us in prison any longer." (2.4.32)

"Sardar Vallabhbhai is with me. His jokes make me laugh until I can laugh no more, not once but several times a day." So wrote the Mahatma to Srinivasa Sastri, after the latter had enquired whether solitude did not lead to depression.¹²⁷

* * *

Every hour in Yeravda was put to use. Patel took early morning and evening walks with the Mahatma, read, prayed, crushed twigs into brushes for his teeth and Gandhi's, did lessons in Sanskrit, made envelopes or bound books, and helped the Mahatma with his letters – sometimes, to relieve Mahadev, taking Gandhi's dictation.

Gandhi had started Vallabhbhai on Sanskrit recitation and pronunciation before Mahadev joined them. Patel would read the Sanskrit verses at their prayers. Later Mahadev guided Vallabhbhai's Sanskrit lessons. Before long the Mahatma would comment that Patel was learning Sanskrit "with the speed of an Arab horse" (28.8.32) and Mahadev noticed that his Patidar pupil with the Sanskrit texts was "like a child with a new toy". (14.8.32) Vallabhbhai started expressing thanks in Sanskrit, using Sanskrit phrases whenever an opportunity arose and cleverly eliciting remarks to which he could retort in terse Sanskrit. One night, looking at Gandhi's charpoy that lay in the open, he asked, "What will you do if it rains?" "We will take it inside," said Gandhi. ततो दुःखतरं तु किम् ("What can be more trying?"), replied Patel. "I knew you asked the question to make use of the quotation," said the Mahatma. (23.8.32)

Requiring paper for the envelopes he was making, Vallabhbhai sought useless paper with – in Gandhi's phrase – "the intentness in a cat's mind for a mouse". (14.6.32) Mahadev jotted down Gandhi's description of Patel's skill: "I doubt if anyone can equal his speed in envelope-making. He makes them without any kind of

measurement. With only his naked eye he makes his estimates, and all his envelopes come out absolutely equal in size." (29.8.32) Another entry brings out Patel's ability, at the age of 56 or 57, to learn new crafts.

Mahadev's diary, 8.5.32: *Bapu is trying to make the Sardar take interest in a variety of things. He received a book yesterday and suggested that the Sardar should repair it...While taking the usual walk this morning, Bapu asked the Sardar whether he was fond of doing odd jobs since childhood or had become a mechanic only in jail.*

The Sardar replied he had no previous experience but he could do things upon seeing how they were done. Bapu remarked that Chittaranjan Das could not even thread a needle, while Motilal could do quite a number of things...The Sardar rebound the book.

The peasants and ashrams of Gujarat were on his mind. In May 1932 he read that the Government had burnt the spinning wheels and looms belonging to the ashram at Vedchhi near Bardoli, and in December he learnt of the Raj's announcement that the buildings of Bardoli Ashram were up for sale. Suppressing his rage, he made a brave comment: "It will be a good thing if they are sold. When we assume Government, these buildings will anyhow be returned to us. Until then, have we not taken possession of their properties – jails like these?" (25.12.32) Despite censorship, word of the resistance in Ras and elsewhere was filtering through to Yeravda. Mahadev noted: "Letters from Kheda show that the villages are giving a good account of themselves and are suffering accordingly....Borsad has shown that it can fight single-handed." (6.4.32) The Mahatma, who after an argument with the Raj had obtained permission to meet other prisoners on occasion, was asked by a newcomer, Morarbhaji Patel, to let the Sardar know "that Bardoli would not disgrace itself". "Some at any rate would fight unto death," Morar Patel added. (24.6.32)

Such messages were gratifying but their Yeravda reflections convinced Vallabhbhai and Gandhi both that taking a share in power might be the only way of protecting the peasants. If some "real power" was transferred to Indians by the new constitution that was being prepared, "we should capture the legislatures", Gandhi said within three months of arrest. (28.3.32) When the Mahatma repeated the opinion some months later, Patel commented:

That is my view also. Government servants are harassing the peasants to such an extent that the only way we can give protection to them is by participating in the Government. However, there will be no point in forming a Government if it cannot be effective. (7.9.32)

Prison was hardly suitable for mapping strategy. Not knowing when they would be let out rendered any kind of planning pointless. Rebelling at their fate was equally futile. Patel's barbed talk notwithstanding, the three were resigned to their situation. At the same time, they looked out for any cracks in the Raj's armour and for opportunities to regain the initiative. Understanding the adversary being almost half the battle, they would dissect any interesting remark by a visiting official. Was it innocuous? A feeler? An "echo of the table-talk of the ruling class", as Gandhi once described a comment made by the Commissioner of Poona? (27.3.32) The trio would debate the motives of MacDonald, the Labourite Premier heading a Tory-dominated coalition, or of Secretary of State Hoare or a lesser functionary of the Raj. On July 6 they discussed Press statements by some Indian moderates against Britain's India policy:

Vallabhbhai: MacDonald will swallow all these protests and his award (on communal electorates) is sure to go against us. Gandhi: I still have hope that MacDonald will stand up against the Tories. V.: You are wrong. They are all birds of the same feather. G.: Still I think he has his own convictions. V.: If he really had them, would he have sold himself to the Tories? He does not wish to get off our backs.

G.: You are right, but that is not because he is selfish. No Englishman would like to give up control over India, apart from a few exceptions like Laski, Horrabin and Brockway. MacDonald has entered into coalition with the Tories in the interest of his country...Mahadev: Is he going to oppose separate electorates for Muslims? G.: No, but he cannot gulp down such electorates for the 'untouchables'.

MacDonald was again discussed on July 15:

G.: The communal award will be a real test for MacDonald. V.: Has he not been weighed and found wanting already? Only today Hoare quoted him in aid. Is it possible that he did so without consulting MacDonald? G.: You cannot blame MacDonald on that

score. Hoare has taken the Indian question off his hands. He tells his fellows in the cabinet that they will lose India if he is not given a free hand. But the communal question is MacDonald's own responsibility....Let us see what he does.

* * *

"I never knew," Patel told Mahadev with a smile, "that I would be kept with Bapu." (11.3.32) The two had worked together for 14 years but this was a new dimension of fellowship. It did not end at the end of a meeting, or of a day, or of a week. It went on and on and on and would end only when the Raj chose to open the prison lock. Living with others was not Vallabhbhai's idea of happiness. Neither in Godhra nor in Borsad had he lived with Vithalbhai. He liked his independence and had preserved it by refusing to remarry. Yet the 16 months he spent with the Mahatma in Yeravda showed that a part of him also sought fulfilment in caring for another.

His affection for the Mahatma found expression in numerous deeds of service: preparing Gandhi's tooth-brush of neem twig every day, squeezing lemons for a drink for him, taking down or copying some of the Mahatma's letters, and so forth. It was reflected, too, in Patel's decision to deprive himself for a period of tea and rice. He was fond of both but wanted, as he told Mahadev, "to eat exactly what Bapu did". (11.3.32) The affection was reciprocal, for Gandhi, thinking of Vallabhbhai and Mahadev both, instructed the latter to "place orders for a cooker, rice and dal", whereupon a delighted Patel told Mahadev: "I was on a strict diet so far. Let's see how good your dishes are." (22.3.32) Again, finding that mosquitoes were troubling Vallabhbhai, Gandhi "wrote a note to the jailor suggesting that he get a mosquito net at once", and asked the warder to take the note forthwith to the jailor's house, it being a Sunday. (27.3.32)

It was not a guru-sishya relationship, for Vallabhbhai was mercilessly pulling the Mahatma's leg and questioning his opinions. The "younger brother" analogy is probably again the most suitable. Patel was the helpful, respectful, argumentative yet obedient younger brother. His own self-respect and independent spirit frequently caused him to argue with Gandhi in the most forthright manner possible. However, he always yielded in the end. Apart from his loyalty – the vow to stick with Gandhi "as long as I live and he lives" –, Vallabhbhai had also come to respect the Mahatma's instinct which could trigger events like the salt march.

The joint internment transformed their camaraderie. Patel shed his reserve and deference. As we have seen, a sparkling

spontaneity took their place. If Vallabhbhai was outspoken, Gandhi was not less direct.

Mahadev's diary, 26.4.32: At 9 a.m. Bapu takes lemon juice with a little soda bicarb. This drink is prepared by the Sardar. Nothing escapes Bapu's eagle eye. He said to the Sardar: "Don't you see that you are holding the spoon wrongly? It should be held only with the handle. The other end is for stirring the drink. Again, you wiped the spoon with your handkerchief with which you wipe your mouth."

Patel had a comment on Gandhi's reaction to an article by Lord Sankey, a member of HMG, that had offended the Mahatma.

1.5.32: Bapu dictated (a) letter to Sankey. The Sardar, who was listening to the dictation, remarked: "Instead of writing a long letter, why don't you simply tell him that he is a liar?" Bapu laughed and replied: "In fact I have said something stronger still. I say his conduct is ungentlemanly."

They differed, too, over a correspondent from Rangoon who was suspected of plagiarism in his letters to Gandhi, a suspicion confirmed by a telegram from the author of their contents:

4.9.32: Bapu sent a copy of this telegram to X together with a note, saying: "It would seem that your letters to us were not your own but someone else's....Again, you have kept this matter secret..." Vallabhbhai said: "Why are you sending him a copy of the telegram? Ask him if there is any truth in the complaint."

Bapu did not like this suggestion and said: "If I give an opportunity to a man to speak falsehood and thus make him speak falsehood, it is tantamount to violence. It is far kinder to tell him what we know."

Yeravda also brought out the difference in their approaches to the Hindu-Muslim question:

30.3.32: This morning we happened to talk about a certain Muslim leader. Vallabhbhai said: "He also took a narrow communal view in the time of crisis and asked for a separate fund for Muslims and a separate appeal for it." Bapu said: "He is not at fault on that score. What amenities do we offer Muslims? They are mostly treated like untouchables. If I wished to send Amtus*

* In all probability the 1927 floods in Gujarat

Salam to Deolali, could I ask ————— (the Diary suppresses the name) to put her up? Indeed it is up to the Hindus to take a step forward. The bitterness can be mitigated only if the Hindus wake up and break down the barriers they have erected."

Vallabhbhai said: "But the manners and customs of Muslims are different. They take meat while we are vegetarians. How are we to live with them in the same place?" Bapu replied: "No, sir. Hindus as a body are nowhere vegetarians except in Gujarat. Almost every Hindu takes meat in the Punjab, U.P. and Sind."

Neither differences nor mutual bluntness affected the warmth between the two. Patel would never directly speak of it, but several gestures a day revealed it and at times even his rebukes did. Once when Gandhi described a point of view of his as "even my death-bed message", Vallabhbhai admonished him: "You have brought us here, and must not now think of proceeding further all alone." (28.3.32) On another occasion an expression used by Patel brought death again to Gandhi's mind. When the Mahatma spoke of it, Vallabhbhai's reaction was strong – and moving.

11.6.32: The Sardar: *Your pain started from the thumb and has reached the elbow. It will now mount the shoulder. Enough of spinning now.* Bapu: *Some day or the other one must mount other people's shoulders.* The Sardar: *No, no. Don't leave us in the lurch. Bring the ship to the shore and then go where you like. And I will go with you.*

The foregoing conversation may have been the basis of future references by Patel and the Mahatma to a compact to leave the world together. The Gandhi-Vallabhbhai relationship, we may add, was enriched by Vallabhbhai's warmth towards Kasturba, and the latter's affection for Patel. On March 16 the Yeravda trio learnt that the 63-year-old wife of Gandhi, who had been arrested at the end of January but released after a few weeks, was rearrested and sentenced for six months. Vallabhbhai said to Gandhi and Mahadev: "Ba is the very image of ahimsa. I have not noticed such ahimsa on the face of any other woman. Ba's humility and simplicity are astonishing." (31.3.32) Another conversation throws light on the Kasturba-Gandhi-Vallabhbhai triangle. It is a square really, for Mahadev too is involved:

10.4.32: *It was now a couple of minutes to three (when Gandhi was to commence a 24-hour period of silence). Therefore Vallabhbhai said: "You have now a few minutes of speech. So tell us if you have*

any instructions to give." I remarked: "You are talking as if Bapu has now to make his last will and testament." Bapu: "All right, I will tell you. Please excuse me if I have offended you in any way."

Saying this he began to laugh. His laugh was occasioned by a sweet reminiscence of his. He said, "Ba said to me, 'Please excuse me if I have offended you in any way.' "

Vallabhbhai asked: "When was that?" Bapu: "When I was arrested, of course. She said this with tears in her eyes. She was afraid we might never meet again on this side of the grave and was anxious not to die unforgiven."

Vallabhbhai was making envelopes one day when Gandhi unexpectedly asked him: "Which portfolio in the Swaraj cabinet would you like reserved for you?" "I will take the beggar's bowl," Patel at once replied. "Das and Motilal," rejoined the Mahatma, "used to discuss what posts they would occupy. Muhammad Ali thought he should become Education Minister and Shaukat Ali wanted to be the Commander-in-Chief." "Well," added Gandhi, "Swaraj is still to come." (25.5.32)

Gandhi had stated, just after his Pact with Irwin, that the Premiership of India would be "reserved for younger minds and stouter hearts"; at Yeravda he asks Vallabhbhai what "portfolio" should be "reserved" for him and Patel refers to the "beggar's bowl"; a year earlier, at the Karachi Congress, Vallabhbhai had spoken of himself and the Mahatma as "we the old" and as men "in a hurry" for independence. It is legitimate to consider these remarks, two by Gandhi and two by Patel, together. Made within the space of fifteen months, they show, firstly, that Gandhi anticipated a role for Vallabhbhai in free India's first cabinet, whenever that was formed. They imply, secondly, that Patel thought that his work would end with Swaraj; at any rate his preoccupation was with obtaining it. Thirdly, they suggest that if the ordering of affairs on the advent of Swaraj was going to be in Gandhi's hands, a "portfolio" rather than India's Prime Ministership was in store for Vallabhbhai. It is likely that this last implication was understood by Patel; hence, perhaps, the "beggar's bowl" remark.

* * *

Manibehn had been arrested at the end of January 1932 along with Kasturba. The two had gone to Bardoli and defied the ban on meetings. After a brief detention in Surat, they were sent to Belgaum and thence, within a few days, to Sabarmati Jail. It was

weeks before Vallabhbhai knew what was happening to his daughter. "I wrote once to Belgaum and sent another letter to Sabarmati but it does not look as if either letter reached you," he said in a letter sent to Manibehn in Sabarmati Jail. "It is not even clear how many months have been awarded to you," he added. Patel informed his daughter of Dahyabhai's fortnightly visits. Dahyabhai's wife and son too had called and Vallabhbhai said to Manibehn, "Baba and Yashoda are doing well."¹²⁸

In May, however, Yashoda died; Patel's grandson Bipin was only five at the time. The Diary notes that on his next visit to Yeravda, "Dahyabhai wept while his little son smiled. The poor child was too young to feel the pang." (7.5.32) At the end of May Manibehn was released but she was arrested again in July, this time for defying a ban in Kheda, sentenced for 15 months and taken to Belgaum prison. During her weeks of freedom she had managed to visit Karamsad and Vallabhbhai heard, to quote the Diary again, that "his old mother [was] still working in the kitchen". Kashibhai would bring "the various ingredients before her, and the old lady cook[ed] rice, dal and vegetable". (20.6.32) In October, however, while Vallabhbhai and Manibehn were both in prison, 85-year-old Ladba died.

"A letter arrived today from Kashikaka in Karamsad," the Sardar wrote to Manibehn on October 27. "In it he writes that our aged Matushri attained Devlok at nine on the morning of Wednesday, October 11. She died peacefully and without being in pain. She would have suffered if she had lived on. So it is good that she went. And it was good that you were able to go and see her last time."¹²⁹ Did Vallabhbhai's eyes moisten as he wrote out the sad words in his letter to Manibehn? Did his thoughts travel to his childhood in Karamsad, to Nadiad, to Gana? To Godhra, Borsad, London and Ahmedabad? To Mani, Dahya and motherless Bipin?

Be that as it may; his 1932 troubles were not over yet. The news of Ladba's going was succeeded by word that Dahyabhai was seriously, indeed critically, ill. Typhoid had struck him. It lasted seven weeks. Friends wanted Manibehn to apply for parole, but Patel did not give his sanction. Mercifully, Dahyabhai survived. "He just about went last year," Vallabhbhai would say, referring to his son, in a letter in 1933.¹³⁰ During his illness Dahyabhai was asked to vacate the flat he was renting in Bombay. The news reached Patel, who also heard a complaint that his son was "stiff and cold" in his dealings with others. The result, a letter in which father counselled son, reveals that whatever else jail did, it facilitated reflection.

Vallabhbhai to Dahyabhai, 6.12.32: *I had thought to write on one or two matters but didn't as you were bed-ridden. Now that you are a little better, I am raising them. Don't let it hurt you....*

*There is nothing to be gained in speaking harshly or offensively....Do not make enemies....At one time my nature too was harsh. But I have felt a lot of remorse over it. I write to you from experience.*¹³¹

* * *

Mahadev studied French, Vallabhbhai Sanskrit and Gandhi astronomy. "The stars address silent discourses to us," the Mahatma mused. "It is holy companionship." (1.7.32) The three fondled the jail cat and its kittens. Patel teasing them on occasion. "Dogs may bark but the caravan passes." Hoare, the Secretary of State for India, had said. The remark stung the prisoners. In October they heard the buzz of a propeller overhead: Willingdon was arriving in Poona for the races. "Thousands of rupees on one race meeting!" Gandhi exclaimed. Vallabhbhai's resentment was expressed differently: "By coming here Willingdon wants to show that he is the ruler and Gandhi only a prisoner." (14.10.32)

The jailor, a Major Mehta, probed them one day about Mussolini: was he not "remarkable" and "a beautiful personality"? "As beautiful as a tiger," said Mahadev. The Mahatma, who had met the Duce the previous year and noticed his shifty eyes, described him as "a cruel man". Next day Patel showed Gandhi a newspaper picture of Italian boys of 8 to 10 years of age receiving military training. "When they grow up," said Vallabhbhai, "they will help Mussolini to destroy the world." "You are right," replied the Mahatma. "And Winston Churchill is a great admirer of Mussolini's.... What powerful opponents we have! But resist them we must. till the end of time." (26-27.5.32) Two days later Patel asked a question that Desai found astonishing.

Mahadev's diary, 29.5.32: He asked me who Vivekananda was and to which part of India he belonged. When I told him that he was a Bengali, he remarked that both Ramkrishna and Vivekanand were born in Bengal! In a letter in the Leader. Subhas Bose had described Vivekananda as his ideal man. That must have provoked Vallabhbhai's curiosity. Now he has decided to read Romain Rolland's books on Ramkrishna and Vivekananda.

* * *

From inside Yeravda's walls Gandhi hurled a weapon. He informed Premier MacDonald that he would fast unto death against HMG's decision on India's untouchables. Pronounced in August

1932 – seven months after the arrest of Patel and Gandhi –. HMG's Communal Award gave separate electorates to Muslims, Sikhs and untouchables. Patel's view that the Award was "sure to go against us" had been proved right, and the Mahatma's hope that MacDonald would not "gulp down" a separate untouchable electorate was belied. The separation of Muslims and Sikhs also went against Gandhi's grain but his weapon, the fast, was aimed only at the untouchable electorate: it would cut up Hindu society. The Mahatma had hinted at a fast against such a cutting up during the RTC. In March 1932, two months after his arrest, Gandhi repeated the warning in a letter to Hoare. The August Award was HMG's reply and the fast was the Mahatma's rejoinder.

Vallabhbhai was critical of Gandhi's decision. Arguing that the Raj would let the Mahatma die, he had objected to the March letter. If the Mahatma was allowed to die, Mahadev had replied, "the public mind would be agitated in a manner of which (the British) have no conception". (11.3.32) Yet Mahadev had agreed with Patel over the letter to Hoare, which was sent after Vallabhbhai said to Gandhi: "I am unconvinced about the rightness of your move, but you are free to do what you think is right." Now, after the Mahatma's letter to MacDonald, sent on August 17, Patel was again greatly agitated. Disapproving of the fast, he also deplored Gandhi's instructions regarding it. The Mahatma had bound his companions to secrecy and told both Hoare and MacDonald that "no one save my two companions" knew of his intention.

Mahadev's diary, 20.8.32: Both Vallabhbhai and I felt that the news of Bapu's impending fast should be passed on to people outside by some means or the other. But Bapu had promised that he would not let this news go out. How could we betray him? Vallabhbhai was very much worried.

If people knew what the Mahatma had in mind, they would strive with HMG for a reversal. "He should have discussed this step with somebody like Srinivasa Sastri," Patel told Mahadev. (19.8.32) And he blamed the Mahatma for the "embarrassing situation" in which he found himself:

There will be people who will say to us: "You were with Bapu. You could have told us about this decision of his. You could have sent us a message with Dahyabhai who sees you every fortnight." (21.8.32)

"How can we do that? Gandhi countered. It would violate jail rules as well as his word to Hoare and MacDonald. Also, argued

Gandhi, "it is far better that this should come upon everybody suddenly." It was necessary "to give a shock even to Malaviyaji and Rajaji". They were both out of prison by now and C.R. was acting Congress President. The two were capable of striving, if not with HMG, at least with the Indian public. This was not unimportant. If caste Hindus and untouchables could agree on an alternative to the untouchable electorate, HMG was bound to accept it. MacDonald had in fact said as much.

"No, no, Vallabhbhai. Previous publication will only do harm. Sudden shock is the treatment required. You are both associated with my decision to some extent, but the final responsibility is mine alone.... Do not become nervous." (21.8.32)

Two days later, when the Mahatma asked if he still had doubts, Patel replied: "Everything will be clear after the event.... In any case, is there anything to be gained by arguing with you? It [still] seems to me that they (the British) would feel greatly relieved if you were to disappear one way or the other." (23.8.32)

Gandhi had not been mistaken. Malaviya, C.R., Tagore, Rajendra Prasad, Sapru and a host of others were jolted into action. To save Gandhi's life, one caste Hindu leader after another asked for a change in orthodox customs. Temples were overnight opened to untouchables. Brahmins dined with them. An Untouchability Abolition League was formed. And Ambedkar and the others who spoke for the untouchables were urged to give up their separate electorate.

The Raj was not entirely hostile or obstructive. Influenced by compassion or political prudence or both, it allowed Ambedkar, C.R., Malaviya and the others seeking an agreed alternative to call on the fasting Gandhi, who lay on a white hospital cot under a mango tree inside the jail yard. Kasturba was permitted to leave Sabarmati Jail to be at her husband's side. Tagore arrived. Noting that Hindu society was finally looking at its shame, he would soon say, "Before our very eyes the wonder had happened."¹³² Instead of the separate electorate, Ambedkar and the other untouchable leaders were offered more legislature seats than HMG had allotted to them. After tough negotiations under the mango tree, the Yeravda Pact was signed, merging untouchable and caste Hindu voters into one stream. The text of the Pact was cabled to MacDonald, who conferred with Hoare till midnight and then wired acceptance to India.

On September 26, the seventh day of his fast, the Mahatma was shown a piece of official paper by Colonel Doyle, the Inspector General of the Raj's Prisons. It signified HMG's reversal. Gandhi

nodded and Kasturba gave him some orange juice. His instinct again vindicated, a starving man lying under a tree in a prison yard had imposed his will on HMG.

Mahadev's diary, 2.10.32: *During Bapu's fast Vallabhbhai's sense of humour had...dried up. Now it blossomed forth again. For giving a sponge bath to Bapu a large number of towels were taken out of his cupboard. "I should like to have an account of the towels," Bapu said.*

"Why should I give you an account?" Vallabhbhai said. "We thought we had lost you. We didn't know you were going to come back and ask us to account for everything."

Turning to Ba, Vallabhbhai added: "Look at this, Ba, isn't he tyrannical? He made Malaviyaji put on khadi, he made Malaviyaji touch untouchables, he brought him to jail and took him to England. He won't rest satisfied until he has made him eat with untouchables and has married his relations to untouchables."

Difficulties came in triumph's wake but Patel had a prescription.

Mahadev's diary, 12.3.33: *I remarked that we would be crushed between the upper and the nether stones of the orthodox Hindus and the followers of Ambedkar. Vallabhbhai: "You need talk of such a possibility only if you allow yourself to come between two stones.... Let the two parties quarrel among themselves."*

* * *

During the fast a conference of Hindus had resolved that "one of the first Acts of the Swaraj Parliament" would be to "guarantee social and religious equality, including the right of temple entry," to untouchables, and that equality would be sought even before Swaraj.¹³³ In pursuance of the resolution, two Bills were moved in the Central Assembly by an elected member named Ranga Iyer, one seeking to prohibit discrimination against untouchables and the other aiming at temple entry in particular. If it became law, the second Bill would enable untouchables – or Harijans, "People of God", as Gandhi and many others increasingly called them – to enter a temple provided a majority of its devotees were agreeable, and make it unlawful for the temple's trustees or a minority of its devotees to keep Harijans out. The Viceroy ruled that the Assembly could only discuss the second Bill.

In another interesting development, the Raj permitted the Mahatma to edit from his room in prison a new weekly journal, *Harijan*. Gandhi had made it clear that *Harijan* would confine itself to social reform.

The first issue came out on February 11, 1933. Jawaharlal, who was in prison in the north, and several others inside and outside jail were perturbed by the Mahatma's preoccupation with the untouchable question. It seemed a diversion from the issue of independence. Patel, his misgivings belied, did not take such a view. On the contrary, he admired the ingenuity or inspiration that enabled Gandhi to address India from inside Willingdon's prison.

What Vallabhbhai did not like was the Mahatma's permission to C.R. to lobby Assembly members for the passage of the temple entry Bill, for the Assembly was what Congress had decided to boycott. "It would be far better for Rajaji to remain in Madras," he told Gandhi, who, however, wrote in *Harijan* that C.R.'s work with the Assembly members was "highly necessary".¹³⁴ The Mahatma was in effect endorsing a step in the direction of council entry, and in February Rajaji told the Press that Congress would not "fanatically hold on" to the policy of "the boycott of legislatures".¹³⁵

Disliking the switch in strategy, Patel was also troubled by the unpopularity of the temple entry Bill. Malaviya had objected to it, as had some other orthodox Hindus, and Ambedkar had said that the untouchables did not care about temple entry. Vallabhbhai wanted Gandhi to get out of the quarrel.

16.2.33: Vallabhbhai: "Against so much opposition how long can you maintain your point? After we have achieved independence, the Bill will be passed within two minutes. I would not object if there were any chance of securing the passage of the legislation, but I am convinced there is no hope."

Bapu: "Why anticipate difficulties?...If I were to give up *Harijan* work, Ambedkar would be the first to attack me, and then, after all is said and done, how can we let the millions of Harijans feel that they have been left to their fate?"

Vallabhbhai's pessimism about the Bill was justified. Faltering under pressure from orthodox Hindus, Ranga Iyer withdrew the Bill 18 months after he had moved it.

* * *

At 4 a.m. on 1st May, 1933, Gandhi put a statement in the hands of Patel, who had just woken up. Written by the Mahatma at 1.30 a.m., the statement said that he would go on a 21-day fast from May 8. "Self-purification" would help his Harijan movement, the statement claimed. "Do I take it that there is no room for the slightest alteration?" Vallabhbhai asked. "You are right," said Gandhi. "God's will be done," said Patel. But Mahadev noticed

that Vallabhbhai was miserable inside and conveyed his observation to the Mahatma. Next day Gandhi asked Mahadev if Patel was "still angry with me". Mahadev replied that there was no anger but "that does not mean that he agrees with your decision". "He is experiencing great mental strain," Mahadev added, whereupon Gandhi said:

I understand that. Do I not realize how great has been God's kindness to me in giving me the companionship of such an extraordinary man as Vallabhbhai? (2.5.33)

Vicious attacks from defenders of orthodoxy had preceded Gandhi's resolve. "The abuses they are hurling at me are wonderfully refreshing," he had written to Jawaharlal. "I am all that is bad and corrupt on earth."¹³⁶ Yet the abuses had also wounded the Mahatma, and the fast was his response. Patel saw this. He had known, he said in a letter from Yeravda, that "the propaganda of certain orthodox Hindus" would "sooner or later compel Bapu to undertake a fast". Even so, "considering Bapu's age and the state of his health, one naturally shudders at the very idea of a 21-day fast".¹³⁷ But he had sensed the finality of the Mahatma's decision.

Telegram from C.R. to Patel, 3.5.33: *To expect that Bapu will pass through this test of fire unharmed is sheer folly. You alone can persuade him to refrain from undertaking this fast....* Patel to C.R., 4.5.33: *It is true that it is folly to be certain that Bapu will pass through this sacrificial test successfully. I consider it however an even greater folly to expect that we would meet with success in our effort to persuade him to give up his decision.*¹³⁸

The Raj did not want Gandhi to die in prison. Also, it had noted his preoccupation with the People of God and the resultant dilution in non-cooperation. It therefore released the Mahatma on the day his fast began. "If God wills," said Gandhi to Vallabhbhai, "we will recite the *Gita* together at the end of the fast." "How can I be with you?" countered the one who was not being released. "With God's help even the impossible becomes possible," rejoined the Mahatma.¹³⁹

But God didn't help. The Raj did release another prisoner but it wasn't Patel. Mahadev was told that he could join the fasting Gandhi in "Parnakuti", Lady Premlila Thackersey's home-on-the-hill in Poona. C.R., who was already at the Mahatma's side, wrote to Vallabhbhai: "Looking forward to Mahadev's coming, though I can realize the tragedy of it as far as you are concerned."¹⁴⁰ Patel featured in the freed Gandhi's first statement to the people of India.

One of the greatest joys of my life was that I had the opportunity of staying in prison with the Sardar. I knew of his invincible courage and his burning love for our country but never before had I the good fortune of spending so much time with him as during the last 16 months. His affection and love overwhelmed me and reminded me of my dear Mother.

“I shall never forget,” the Mahatma added, “how concerned [Vallabhbhai] was about the anxieties and troubles of the peasants of Bardoli and Kheda.”¹⁴¹

Gandhi's colleagues did not yet know that he would survive all his fasts and die of a bullet. As he grew older, each new fast of his made them more anxious than before. Yet the Mahatma understood his physique better than his friends and doctors. On the tenth day of the fast, C.R. wrote to a lonely, anxious and incarcerated Vallabhbhai: “Bapu is in wonderfully good condition. I think all will be well.”¹⁴² The 29th of May finally arrived and Vallabhbhai, joined by now by another satyagrahi prisoner, Chhaganlal Joshi, wrote off relieved letters to Gandhi, Mahadev and Devadas.

*To Gandhi: God has indeed been immensely kind, but now I beg of you, be kind to us. To Mahadev: Today our eyes are filled with tears of joy and we are thankful to God. I am looking forward to your letter this evening. To Devadas: Please give our salutations to Ba and ask her to send her blessings. We have not been able to be of any use....*¹⁴³

Gandhi had written to Patel on the second day of the fast and referred to “your loving care for me”.¹⁴⁴ Four or five days after the fast ended he sent another letter, along with some mangoes, which were let through by the prison authorities.

*Patel to Gandhi, 5.6.33: After almost a month I have been able to see your handwriting... Why did you send me mangoes? Today you want to spoil me but heaven knows what you will do tomorrow! In your kindness and in your non-violence there is so much cruelty and violence! If you do not believe me, ask Ba. She will be in entire agreement with me.*¹⁴⁵

* * *

The Mahatma told C.R. on June 1 that while he wanted a small number to keep up the struggle, mass disobedience should come to an end. He added that it might be right at some point in the future to “think of taking power in our hands” even under “the constitution

they (the British) are framing".¹⁴⁶ Issued in March 1933, a White Paper had outlined the British plan for India: elected provincial legislatures with wide powers and a federal assembly at the centre where princes or their nominees would fill a third of the seats. Muslims, Sikhs and Europeans would vote separately and have a minimum share of seats. Sind would be detached from Bombay presidency, Orissa from Bengal presidency and Burma from India. Special powers vested in the Viceroy and, to a smaller extent, in the Governors would enable Britain to exercise ultimate authority.

Neither Gandhi nor Patel nor anyone else in Congress could countenance the federal part of the plan, which was far too undemocratic, or to the special powers, which were imperialistic, but the offer of provincial autonomy was attractive. For the time being, however, the White Paper did not receive attention. Imprisonments, beatings and bans had estranged India. What Congressmen outside prison debated was the continuance of satyagraha.

Over 300 of them gathered in Poona in the middle of July, agreed to limit disobedience to carefully chosen occasions, and authorized Gandhi to seek an interview with Willingdon. The Viceroy refused to grant it, and the Mahatma reverted to protest. On July 31 he informed the Raj that along with Kasturba, Mahadev and 30 others he would walk from Sabarmati to the village of Ras. That evening he was re-arrested and lodged in Sabarmati Jail. On August 2 he was brought to Yeravda, where he found Vallabhbhai missing. He was told that Patel had been removed the previous day to Bombay for an operation on his nose. "The nest is there but the bird has flown," commented the Mahatma.¹⁴⁷ After a few days the truth was revealed. Vallabhbhai had been transferred to Nasik Jail, not to a Bombay hospital. Exclaimed the Mahatma: "So they have deceived Vallabhbhai also. He must have thought that he was being taken for an operation. What meanness! This is not a wound which will heal rapidly."¹⁴⁸

Gandhi's suspicion was not quite justified. Separation, not deception, was the Raj's intent. Patel's nose was no doubt troubling him. Cauterized the day before his January 1932 arrest, the nose had been affected for the worse, in Vallabhbhai's view, by the windy journey from Bombay, where he was arrested, to Yeravda. The Raj's doctors were prepared to operate on it in Poona but Patel wanted the job done in Bombay by a surgeon he was used to. The Raj refused to move him to Bombay and Vallabhbhai refused surgery in Poona. However, he knew where he was going when he was being taken to Nasik Jail. In Yeravda, his feelings injured by the separation and also by his surmise of deception, Gandhi repeated, "while lying down at night", a line from Bhartruhari: "God, this is a wound that even yoga will not heal."¹⁴⁹

Denial of facilities in prison for his Harijan work led to another fast by Gandhi. It began on August 16. On August 18 he refused a conditional release offered by the Raj. Two days later he was moved to Sassoon Hospital. His life in danger, he was unconditionally released on August 23, eleven months before his sentence was to end.

Gandhi to Patel, 24.8.33: *This time I somehow do not see my way clear before me. In Yeravda prison I was thinking of you all the while, as I had never expected that you would be removed to Nasik the day before I was taken there.*¹⁵⁰

Sharing Vallabhbhai's cell when the news of Gandhi's release reached Nasik Jail, Mangaldas Pakvasa observed Patel's cogitation on the choice that Gandhi had been confronted with: should he defy a law and re-enter prison or refrain from inviting rearrest? Another fast was on the cards if he re-entered jail and the Raj continued to deny him facilities for Harijan work; there was humiliation, on the other hand, in a free Gandhi obeying the Raj's rules. Pakvasa found Vallabhbhai pacing up and down in the jail yard at six in the morning and muttering to himself while doing so. In the end, according to Pakvasa, Patel reached the conclusion that Gandhi should stay out of prison.¹⁵¹

Reaching the same decision, Gandhi announced in Poona that he was "honour bound" to shelve attacks on the Raj until August 1934, when his sentence would have ended, and confine himself meanwhile to Harijan work. By this time hundreds more, including Prasad in Bihar and C.R. in the south, had entered the Raj's prisons as part of the programme of selective disobedience.

Life in Nasik Jail was aggravating. A wall separating Patel's ward from the rest of the prison was raised by three feet. "We won't lose heart no matter what is done", he told the superintendent. "Put us in a small dark cell if you want."¹⁵² Vallabhbhai was not allowed the newspapers he wanted. For a while a convict was his only cellmate. Later he had no companion at all. His nose gave him sleepless nights; sometimes he had to sit up for hours until the attack of pain subsided. Sentences from letters he wrote were scored out. Other Nasik prisoners like Darbar Gopaldas were not permitted to meet him. In the absence of the Mahatma and Mahadev, his Sanskrit studies flagged. In October, however, the authorities reduced Patel's misery by assigning one of the Nasik politicals, Dr Chandulal Desai of Broach, who had been part of the Sardar's team during the Bardoli struggle, to his room.

A part of his heart was in Europe, where Vithalbhai lay ill. He had left India in March 1932 and not returned. Earlier, in January 1932, Vithalbhai had been caught in Willingdon's swoop but soon released

on health grounds. His travels overseas took him to the U.S.A., Eire, where he was invited by de Valera, and Austria, where Subhas Bose joined him. Both Vithalbhai and Bose were critical of Gandhi's 21-day fast and his emphasis on the Harijan question. In a joint statement issued from Austria in May, Vithalbhai and Bose declared that Gandhi's leadership had failed.

In September Vithalbhai fell seriously ill. Receiving word of his brother's condition, Vallabhbhai wrote "several letters conveying his grave concern and deep anxiety" but "these letters did not reach Vithalbhai at all". Whether they were detained by the Raj or lost in transit or held up at the European end is not known, but poor Vithalbhai felt that his younger brother had "neglected" him. Subhas Bose cared painstakingly for Vithalbhai, as did some other acquaintances, Indian and European, but on October 22 Vithalbhai died in a clinic near Geneva.¹⁵³

The blow to Vallabhbhai was painful. The thought that his brother had to die "in a strange land and without anyone near to whom he could open his heart" preyed on his mind.¹⁵⁴ He would have been unhappier still had he known that his letters had not reached Vithalbhai. The body was flown to India. In a cable to Gandhi, Subhas said that Vallabhbhai should perform the final rites. He hoped, Subhas added, that the Mahatma would "be able to make necessary arrangements".¹⁵⁵ Gandhi, who "did not think it proper" that he should ask for a parole for Vallabhbhai told the Press that he did not expect Patel to apply for it.¹⁵⁶ He was right about Vallabhbhai, but some of Vithalbhai's friends requested the Government to release Patel for the funeral.

The Raj's response was to inform Vallabhbhai that he could be released for 48 hours provided he "undertook" to make no political speech and also to present himself for re-arrest "at a previously agreed time and place". "I cannot purchase my liberty at the sacrifice of my honour and self-respect," replied Patel, and Dahyabhai performed the last rites for Vithalbhai, who had no children of his own.¹⁵⁷ A huge procession followed Vithalbhai's body to the cremation ground in Bombay. Devoted to her uncle, Manibehn, mercifully out of prison at the time, joined the procession, and Sarojini Naidu made a moving funeral oration.

His brother's death occasioned more than one conflict between Vallabhbhai and the Raj. Numerous letters and telegrams of condolence had been forwarded to him by the Government. Unable to acknowledge all of them individually, he requested the Government to convey to the Press a message from him of "gratefulness to all who have sympathised with me" along with the explanation that it was "not possible to give individual replies from here". The Raj said it

would accede to his request if he deleted the words "from here". The proud Patidar said he could not, and the message was suppressed.¹⁵⁸

Vallabhbhai's sentiment for his talented brother had survived Vithalbhai's abrupt ways and the older brother's grouse over Congress's 1931 Presidency. The prison walls that blocked a final glimpse deepened the sentiment, which retained a deferential element despite the passage of years. The Sardar was moved, too, by his older brother's deathbed remarks, which included a prayer for India's "early independence". Writing a week after Vithalbhai's death, he asked Mavlankar: "Would it have been too much for the millowners (of Ahmedabad) to shut their mills for a day?"¹⁵⁹

*Gandhi to Patel, 27.10.33: Subhas seems to have outdone himself by his devoted nursing. I have written to him about it and I think you also should.*¹⁶⁰

That Vallabhbhai wrote such a letter is quite likely. It has not, however, come to light. In any case, relations between him and Subhas were soon to deteriorate. A factor in the worsening was Vithalbhai's will, which left more than three-fourths of his estate to Subhas, to be spent by him "for the political uplift of India and preferably for publicity work on behalf of India's cause in other countries".¹⁶¹ P. T. Patel and Gordhanbhai Patel were named the will's executors. The former died shortly after Vithalbhai's death, leaving Gordhanbhai – Vithalbhai's biographer – as the sole executor. According to Gordhanbhai, who brought the body to India, Subhas was tardy in sending him the original will but had posted a copy. Gordhanbhai saw Vallabhbhai in Nasik Jail with the copy and found himself subjected to "a searching cross-examination":

He enquired why it was that Vithalbhai's signature was not attested by a medical man, although he was lying seriously ill in the clinic and was treated by doctors when the will was made.... He asked me if the original paper in the handwriting of Vithalbhai was preserved, as, considering the nature of his illness, it could not have been dictated by him at a stretch.

He further wanted me to ascertain why all the three men who attested Vithalbhai's signature were men who hailed from Bengal and why two of them were merely students, in spite of the fact that eminent men like Bhulabhai Desai, Walchand Hirachand, Ambalal Sarabhai and others who were particularly friendly with Vithalbhai were present at the time round about Geneva.

Adds Gordhanbhai, who apart from being Vithalbhai's fervent admirer was a lawyer himself:

*I had neither the time nor the mental fitness to think of these and similar questions, which might have, in normal circumstances, struck me. Subsequently, I wrote several letters to Subhas, requesting him to throw light on these points, but I was disappointed by his continued silence.*¹⁶²

It would seem that Vallabhbhai harboured a doubt “even as to the genuineness of the signature on the will as it was signed on the very day that Vithalbhai died”.¹⁶³ His disapproval of Vithalbhai’s money going to Subhas was deepened by Gordhanbhai’s report – based, he claimed, on a conversation with Subhas – that Subhas intended to use the money at his discretion, unfettered by the guidelines in the will.

Vallabhbhai would be released in July 1934. Six months later Subhas’s attorneys asked the executor to send the money to Subhas. Gordhanbhai replied that he could not give it until there was agreement or a ruling on the interpretation of the will. The dispute dragged on but was not taken to court for a long time. Gordhanbhai claimed afterwards that he was waiting for “passions to die down”.¹⁶⁴ In 1938, after Subhas became Congress President, the Sardar proposed that the disputed money should go to a special committee of Congress. Subhas said he was agreeable, but the two could not agree on the committee’s composition.

Meanwhile, Patel had obtained a commitment from “all his relations who could possibly claim to be the legal heirs of Vithalbhai” that they would not accept “a single pie” from the estate. In January 1939 Gordhanbhai moved the Bombay High Court. We will see in due course that the first half of 1939 was marked by a Patel-Bose and a Gandhi-Bose clash. The court fight over Vithalbhai’s will supplied an additional dimension to the clash. Both sides engaged top-ranking lawyers. Bhulabhai Desai, Chimanlal Setalvad and Motilal Setalvad represented the executor and the legal heirs of Vithalbhai; Chitta Ranjan Das’s brother P. R. Das and Maneksha appeared for Subhas. Justice B. J. Wadia’s court was “crowded to its maximum capacity throughout” and the case “created great excitement in the public mind”.

Wadia ruled that the reference in the will to the objects on which Subhas was to spend Vithalbhai’s money was vague and hence invalid. Setting aside that reference, Wadia held that Vithalbhai’s money belonged to his legal heirs. Two days later Vallabhbhai announced that the money would go to a Vithalbhai Memorial Trust. Subhas appealed against the judgment and his brother Sarat Bose “stoutly defended his interests”, but in September 1939 Chief Justice Sir John Beaumont and Justice Kania confirmed Justice Wadia’s

ruling. A year later, on behalf of Vithalbhai's heirs, Vallabhbhai handed over one lakh and twenty thousand rupees to the trust.¹⁶⁵

* * *

We must return, however, to Nasik Jail, where Vallabhbhai learnt of his brother's death. Pyarelal, the Mahatma's future biographer, visited him early in 1934 and found the 58-year-old prisoner looking old. Having heard Pyarelal's account of Patel's appearance, Ramdas, the third son of Gandhi, sent him an anxious letter. Replied Vallabhbhai: "I am two-and-a-quarter-years older than when I was arrested, and it is not surprising if Pyare felt that I was entering old age. But don't worry in the least about my imprisonment. We asked for it of our own free will and have accepted it with joy."¹⁶⁶

If ageing, Patel was showing no diminution in his confidence, realism or sense of fun. An activist who wrote lamenting the drop in morale was told, "Perhaps God wanted to crumble our pride,"¹⁶⁷ and more than one despairing correspondent was reminded that "night was bound to be followed by dawn".¹⁶⁸ When he heard of the death of an old colleague, Fulchand Bapuji Shah of Nadiad, Vallabhbhai sent a detailed account of Fulchand's going to Manibehn, who was in Belgaum Jail. Fulchand's wife, son, other relatives and associates were all away when his unexpected end came in the middle of one night. After recalling Fulchand's goodness and long service, the Sardar passed on to Manibehn a verse on the vanity of kinship:

*"Whose son? Whose calf? Whose father? Whose mother? Useless queries! Each goes alone in the end, taking only his sins and good deeds."*¹⁶⁹

To fight boredom he occasionally set teasers for his correspondents – and censors. The Bombay politician Nariman would become the one who had maan for naari, Jamnadas would be turned into the das of the river Jamuna, Jankidevi Bajaj changed into the Janki among the devis, and so forth.¹⁷⁰

That his shoulders were ready for new burdens was revealed when a calamitous earthquake ravaged Bihar in January 1934. Whole towns were reduced to ruins; floods, chasms and twisted rails distorted the landscape. Thousands perished. Vallabhbhai experienced an almost uncontrollable desire to be in Bihar and organize relief there. In letter after letter he poured out his feelings. "For the first time in two years I am finding jail hard," he said to Swami Anand. He recalled his 1927 effort against the Gujarat floods, recognized that that was "small game" in comparison with the Bihar tragedy, exhorted that "everything else should be left on one side and Bihar relief should be made the sole talking-point and the sole activity", cursed that "there was none in Bihar to tell the Government bluntly what it needed to

do", dreamt about "special trains loaded with grain, clothes and quilts rushing from Bombay to Bihar", and regretted the mildness in Rajendra Prasad, who was released by the Raj in the cause of relief.¹⁷¹

While penning, in prison, his fervent and critical comments, Patel could not of course have known of what was being done for earthquake victims by Prasad and the Bihar Congress or by the Raj. Perhaps some of his criticism was unfair. All the same, an "ageing" man was hungering for a chance to grapple with an immense calamity in a province far removed from his own.

The peasants of Gujarat and in particular of Ras were even more on his mind. Despite his advice that Bihar should take precedence over "everything else", he was unhappy when he learned that Raojibhai had left Ras in order to assist there. Aware that Ashabhai Patel was struggling for firewood for Ras's villagers and for scholarships for its youths, Vallabhbhai wrote to Raojibhai: "All of you have gone and parked yourselves there (in Bihar). But one who has lost his all in order to honour our pledge of defiance has been left all alone, and I don't like it at all. God's will be done."¹⁷² A letter he sent on 13.2.34 to Chhaganlal Joshi, who had been a fellow-prisoner in Nasik, underscores Vallabhbhai's interest in associates and co-workers: 44 of them are named in it.^{172a}

* * *

Gandhi to Patel, Nov. 1933: *My difficulty is that you are not by my side....Therefore I imitate Ekalavya, who, on being rejected by Dronacharya, learned to be an archer by keeping Dronacharya's clay idol before him.... I fashion your image every day and put my questions to it.*¹⁷³

They wrote to each other once a week. Vallabhbhai would urge Gandhi not to neglect Kasturba, who was in prison for most of 1933 and the first five months of 1934. "I shall keep writing to Ba," "A letter to Ba will definitely go every week," the Mahatma would reply.¹⁷⁴ Patel's nose and stomach featured in Gandhi's letters, and every letter from Vallabhbhai breathed concern for the Mahatma. "I know your eye is on me all along," Gandhi said in one of his replies, adding, "Will it not protect me from harm?" "Please do not lose your temper," Gandhi wrote on another occasion, "for I am writing this at 2.45 a.m."¹⁷⁵

At times human beings provided the connection. Agatha Harrison, an English Quaker striving for reconciliation between India and Britain, visited Patel in Nasik Jail before joining Gandhi in Bihar. She would recall the two meetings 14 years later:

Harrison to Patel, 2.2.48: *Do you remember that before I joined Gandhiji in Bihar, I came to Nasik Jail to see you? This delayed my arrival in Patna and when Gandhiji asked me why I was late, I said: "I have been to see your friend." And I shall never forget the expression on his face when I told him this.*¹⁷⁶

Manibehn, Dahyabhai's boy Bipin ("Baba" or "Babo") and Ambalal Sarabhai's daughter Mridula spent a few days with Gandhi in Wardha in October 1933. "Babo is the picture of health," Gandhi informed Vallabhbhai. Mani and Mridula had been in Belgaum Jail together and had become close friends. After a few weeks of freedom, Mani courted arrest again, along with Kasturba. The latter was detained in Sabarmati and Manibehn was sent once more to Belgaum.

Vallabhbhai to Manibehn, 4.12.33: *I have read in the newspapers about your having reached your camp. You didn't get much peace while you were outside. But your being with them for a while meant a lot to Dahyabhai and Baba. Baba doesn't like your leaving him at all. But he is a child and will forget after some days.*¹⁷⁷

Calling on Vallabhbhai shortly before this letter was written, Gordhanbhai had shown him a copy of Vithalbhai's will. Apart from the bequest to Subhas, Vithalbhai had willed Rs. 10,000 to Kashibhai and some shares to Somabhai's son Manibhai. There was nothing for Manibehn or Dahyabhai. Informing Manibehn of these facts, the Sardar added: "It is a very good thing that he has left the rest, about one and half lakh rupees, for charity."¹⁷⁸ Launched in November 1933 on a tour in the Harijan cause and drawing, as he said to Patel, "huge crowds everywhere", Gandhi hoped to see Manibehn in Belgaum, which was on his itinerary. But he was refused permission. "It is galling to think," he wrote to her father, "that I shall be two days in Belgaum without being able to meet her."¹⁷⁹

* * *

Some of the Nasik politicals took a step that Vallabhbhai would not like: unbeknownst to him, they initiated, in the spring of 1934, the Congress Socialist Party as a faction within Congress. Ere long he would chastise them for what he saw as "claptrap, catchwords and mere learned talk".¹⁸⁰ While the socialists were making their plans, Gandhi was making his. To Patel's consternation, he announced in April 1934 that selective disobedience too would be suspended. He himself would retain the right to disobey, Gandhi added, but others

should give it up. And Congress, he proposed, should permit council-entry to members desiring it.

Vallabhbhai called it "Bapu's bombshell" in a letter to Manibehn¹⁸¹ and told Gandhi that he was "puzzled" and "pained" by the decision. It amounted to a baffling "revival of the Swaraj party". Gandhi had "snatched away the weapon with which he had armed the people".¹⁸² In his North Indian prison Jawaharlal had identical reactions, but Congressmen outside were with Gandhi, who reckoned that suspension would give "much-needed respite to civil resisters who are today tired" and enable them to emerge "stronger and more equipped for the next battle whenever it comes".¹⁸³ He tried to allay Vallabhbhai's unease.

Gandhi to Patel, 18.4.34: *I can see from your letters the pain you have felt.... Have patience and you will see that everything will turn out well in the end.... It should be quite easy to understand the revival of the Swaraj party. Don't you think it is better for some one who is always dreaming of jalebi to eat it and find out its actual taste for himself? Those who daily attend the councils in spirit should be permitted to enter them in fact. I have not snatched away the weapon. I have only postponed its use to prove its efficacy.*¹⁸⁴

Manibehn, in Belgaum, shared her father's misgivings. To her Vallabhbhai wrote:

16.4.34: *[The decision] is somewhat difficult to understand, but those of us who are in jail need not waste time in trying to resolve such puzzles.... When we are out of jail, we too will have to interest ourselves in what is taking place.... What is clear is that things will no longer go on as they have hitherto. God's will be done.*¹⁸⁵

The proud Patidar had difficulty with the loss of face involved in the suspension. In a village like Ras, detractors were sure to taunt the faithful about their fruitless sufferings. Yet during their Yeravda conversations Patel had agreed with Gandhi that capturing legislatures might be necessary. What he did not like was the prospect of Swarajist survivors enjoying office while resisters were left only with bitter memories. Not yet realizing that power in the new dispensation would come to him, Vallabhbhai was not even aware that, pressed by a recently-released C. R. and others, Gandhi had agreed that Congress as such, and not Swarajists on behalf of Congress, should enter councils.

Though its President, Vallabhbhai, was still in jail, the AICC – the only committee of Congress that was not banned – met in Patna in the third week of May. It confirmed the suspension of disobedience

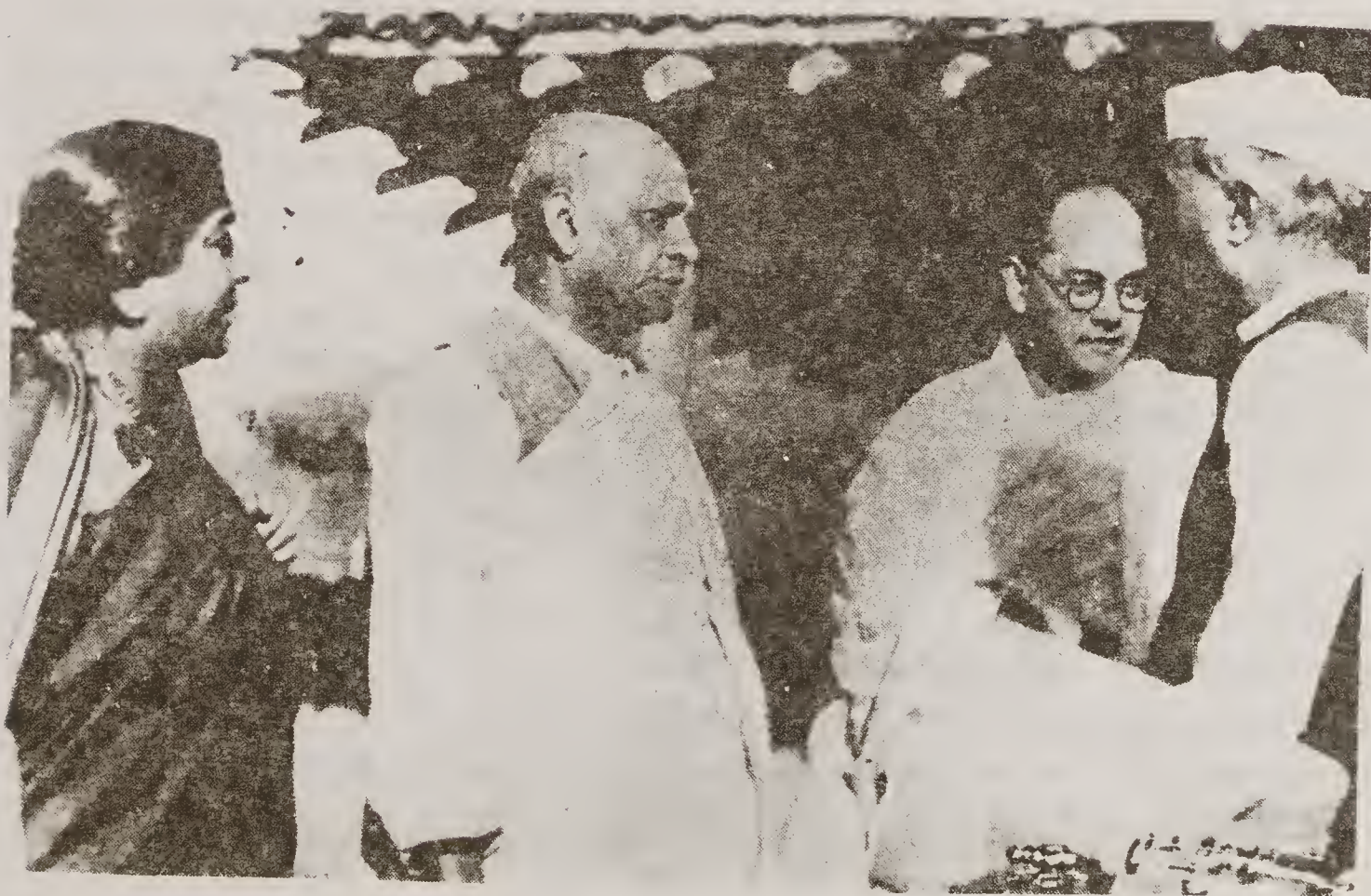
and declared that Congress would directly enter the legislatures. C.R. gave expression to the new thinking:

*Withdrawing a movement of sacrifice is often necessary and should not be deemed a matter for shame. The situation now is different from what it was in 1922. We should now go into the elections on behalf of the Congress. Nobody can prevent the adoption of civil resistance by the Congress at any future time.*¹⁸⁶

This was different from appeasing the old Swarajists. As the reality sank in, Patel's opposition to the switch in strategy subsided. Zest re-entered his letters to Manibehn; he offered to send her Edwin Montagu's *Diary*, which he had just gone through and found "worth reading".¹⁸⁷ In response to the AICC decisions, the Raj's bans on Congress and its bodies were lifted and prisoners were gradually released. After a period of 30 months and ten days spent in the Yeravda and Nasik prisons, Vallabhbhai was let out on July 14. Manibehn was set free a week earlier, and the Khan brothers in August, but Jawaharlal, who had been rearrested in February 1934 after being released in August 1933, was not to be discharged until September 1935.

The Government of Bombay had been opposed to the Sardar's release, thinking it "practically certain that Mr Patel will proceed to work up the peasantry in Gujarat". But it recognized in a letter to the Home Secretary in New Delhi, Hallett, "that this is likely to be the position so long as Mr Patel lives". Though clear in his mind that Vallabhbhai's release could not be delayed, Hallett too thought that "Mr Patel might support... the revival of civil disobedience and persuade others to do so".¹⁸⁸ But he was mistaken.

FIVE
1934-39
BOSS



“IN the twinkling of an eye did civil disobedience yield place to council entry,” writes the Congress historian.¹ Four days after his release, Vallabhbhai was saying to Mahadev that he would “send everybody to the Assembly and then return home”.² By home he meant jail but the reference to it was light-hearted and only made to ease his transition from one who had filled prisons to one who would fill legislatures. A new Central Assembly was to be elected towards the end of 1934. Encouraged by Gandhi, Congress had declared its intention to enter it, and Patel, his Presidency reactivated by release, gave himself the job of ensuring Congress’s success at the hustings. His nose needed surgery and was in fact the reason the Raj had given for his release but the treatment was postponed. So was a much-desired visit to colleagues in Gujarat: Begging their forgiveness for not “being in your midst immediately”, he also asked them to reject, for the time being, “the temptation of offering resistance” to the Raj. Their immediate tasks, he advised, were “to help the distressed farmers” and, now that the bans were removed, “to revive the committees of Congress”.³

He had gone from Nasik to his son’s flat on Sandhurst Road in Bombay and urged the city’s merchants to give ten lakh rupees for Gujarat’s peasants. After a short reunion with Manibehn, Dahyabhai and Bipin, he left, within two weeks of his release, for Benares, to chair a WorCom session. Gandhi and Mahadev met him in Benares, as did Acharya Narendra Dev, who had presided in May at the Congress Socialist Party’s first gathering. Vallabhbhai frankly told Dev what he thought of the Socialists. A few days later Mahadev wrote to Patel: “Your straight talk seems to have had the right effect on Narendra Dev. He said to Bapu: ‘Please correct our mistakes and take work from us. Do not regard us as separate.’”⁴

The uncertainty that Vallabhbhai had felt in April was now well behind him. He had a clear goal, strengthening Congress. The clarity came to his rescue when Gandhi hurled another surprise and announced that he would leave Congress! Something was expected from the Mahatma at the end of August, when the self-imposed ban

on his political activities was to expire, but not this. C.R. and Azad were aghast, the former feeling that Congress's election programme "will crumble to pieces" were Gandhi to carry out his threat. "You will surely be disappointed," Rajaji wired the Mahatma, "if you think you can retire from Congress now and keep it or yourself politically important."⁵ Azad also expostulated with Gandhi, as did other Congress leaders, but not Vallabhbhai.

The Mahatma was not running away from Congress. "I do not retire to a cave," he explained to C.R. "I hold myself at everybody's disposal."⁶ Released from the "stifling effect" of his personality, Congress would witness a free espousal of different views, socialist, Gandhian, centrist, rightist, or whatever, and each faction would find its level. Secondly, his departure might facilitate an honourable settlement between Congress and the Raj; if it didn't come about and a clash proved necessary, he could be summoned to lead it. Grasping ahead of others that these were Gandhi's hopes, Patel also realized that they were his hopes too. He wanted the socialists, for instance, to have it out with him in Congress; and he was open to the idea of an honourable settlement with the British. C.R. commented on his attitude:

Gandhiji has many blind followers who will not see anything with their own eyes but only with his. But Sardar is in a class by himself as a blind follower. His eyes are clear and bright. He can see everything but he deliberately allows his eyes to be blinkered and attempts to see only with Gandhiji's eyes.⁷

The appraisal was off the mark, at least as far as Gandhi's resignation was concerned. Vallabhbhai's own "clear and bright" eyes saw health for Congress in Gandhi's departure. In a letter to Mahadev he said: "The 'socialists' would like to keep Bapu inside Congress without accepting any of his ideas. They are all angry with me because I am in favour of Bapu leaving Congress, and if he goes the 'socialists' will have to fend for themselves."⁸ Revising his view, C.R. explained to an English friend that Gandhi's withdrawal from Congress was more "a judicial separation than a divorce".⁹ In fact the separation was judicious.

Released on an 11-day parole because of his wife's illness, Jawaharlal used his brief liberty to send, in August 1934, a long, frank letter to Gandhi criticizing the suspension of disobedience and the revival of council entry. His complaint was that opponents of satyagraha had become "high priests in our temple of freedom".¹⁰ Nehru's tone troubled Patel but Gandhi was not worried. "Jawaharlal's explosion is not so dangerous as it sounds," he wrote to Vallabhbhai. "He only exercised his right to let off steam. I believe

he is now quiet.”¹¹ However, in the formal letter to Patel in which he tendered his resignation from Congress, the Mahatma assigned a future role to Jawaharlal that Vallabhbhai would not have conceded on his own. “I miss at this juncture,” said Gandhi, “the association and advice of Jawaharlal who is bound to be the rightful helmsman of the organisation in the near future.”¹²

Naming the “helmsman of the future” was Gandhi’s idea of taking his hands off! True, he was now giving much of his time to the promotion of village industries and the nutritional needs of his collaborators. “Four oz. of wheat, two oz. of rice, so many oz. of vegetables, these and other problems fully occupy the time of India’s famous leader,” C.R. noted.¹³ Yet the declaration regarding Jawaharlal showed that Gandhi’s resignation was only partial. As before, the proposal to elevate Jawaharlal was accompanied by a clear recognition of Vallabhbhai’s writ in Gujarat. “I can fully understand your feelings about Gujarat,” the Mahatma wrote to Patel. “Do just as you feel like doing.”¹⁴

A few of Vallabhbhai’s friends in Gujarat had joined the CSP – “in accordance” one of them, Rohit Mehta, told Patel, “with Pandit Jawaharlal’s advice”. Vallabhbhai answered that he did not believe “for a moment” that Nehru had passed on such divisive advice from prison or parole; if he had, Patel added, Jawaharlal would also have sent in his resignation from Congress’s Secretaryship, a post he had held since the Karachi session. Patel spelt out his difficulties with the socialists. Firstly, they were “not agreed even regarding the definition of socialism”: “there are 84 castes among Brahmins whereas, it would seem, there are 85 different types of socialists!” Secondly, they were “wasting time speculating about the social and political organisation in the future independent Government of India” when the “duty today” was to acquire independence. Thirdly, “some socialists merely talk; with such persons I shall never be able to get on.”¹⁵ Finally, he could not accept an organized group within Congress. To his Gujarat colleagues Vallabhbhai sent an open message:

*I am confident that the seasoned workers of Gujarat will have no time or taste for indulgence in dreams of remote idealism.... You who have tasted the sweet experience of a life of mute silent service for fifteen years can have no attraction for mere learned talk.*¹⁶

Patel vacated the chair for Rajendra Prasad when Congress met in October 1934 in Bombay. Prasad’s name had been proposed by a few Congress committees, and Gandhi had asked him to accept the honour, but he was Vallabhbhai’s choice as well. Ever since their first meeting in 1918, the views of the two had tended to coincide. Another friend from 1918, Jivatram Kripalani, became Congress’s General

Secretary in Bombay. This appointment was entirely Patel's doing. Kripalani, who had moved from Gujarat to the U.P., where among other things he was directing a large khadi ashram, has recalled: "Vallabhbhai wanted to see me urgently. I went and met him. He said that the previous night he had suggested my name as the General Secretary. The proposal had been welcomed by Gandhiji and Rajendra Babu. I thought it was too high and responsible a position for me and said I had to consult others of the ashram. But Vallabhbhai brushed aside the plea."¹⁷ Kripalani would serve long as General Secretary and a WorCom member.

The chairman of Congress's Parliamentary Board (CPB) was Ansari, named by Gandhi before Patel's release from jail, and from October Prasad was President, yet, making Bombay rather than Bardoli or Ahmedabad his base, Patel was the all-India boss as far as the elections were concerned. He would remain Congress's electoral boss until the end of his life, raising funds, selecting candidates, determining Congress's attitude to other parties, guiding the choice of the leader of Congress's group in a legislature. The role began in 1934, with the elections to the Central Assembly. The Swarajist survivors who had hoped, while Vallabhbhai was still in jail, that a "new Swaraj party would be an autonomous parliamentary wing of the Congress"¹⁸ – to quote one of them, K. M. Munshi – had to submit to the Sardar's control.

Certain of Gujarat's votes, Vallabhbhai gave his time to electioneering in U.P., Bihar, Madras, Punjab and Delhi. He was not interested in a seat for himself. Power was his aim, not position. Prasad and C.R. also stayed out. Winning 44 of the 49 "general" or unreserved seats and 17 of the "reserved" seats, Congress ended up with an impressive tally of 61 out of a maximum of 104 elected places. Considering that 8 of these were reserved for Europeans and 11 for landlords and others representing special interests, the "retired" Mahatma was not wrong in remarking to Patel that "the election results are really wonderful".¹⁹ However, the Assembly also contained 41 unelected officials or nominated members who denied Congress a majority.

Of the 30 elected seats reserved for Muslims, 16 were filled by a bloc led by Jinnah, a handful by sympathizers or members of Congress and the rest by supporters of the Raj. Congress and the Raj possessing more or less equal strength in the house of 145 members, the result of a division often turned on the stand of Jinnah's bloc. Twelve legislators in Congress's ranks belonged to the Congress Nationalist faction led by Malaviya and Aney and opposed to HMG's provision for a quota of Muslim seats. Mainstream Congressmen didn't like this communal quota either,

but they were prepared, in view of Muslim opinion in its favour, to withhold rejection until an agreed solution emerged.

The challenge before Bhulabhai Desai, who, with Vallabhbhai's blessings, was elected leader of Congress's group in the Assembly, was to enlist Jinnah's sixteen without losing Malaviya's twelve. The skilful Desai often succeeded, but an attempt made by Prasad and C.R. to win Jinnah's support for "a solid united front" failed. Patel, Prasad, C.R. and Bhulabhai were at one in rejecting Jinnah's condition that "Congress should accept the Communal Award by an express declaration".²⁰

* * *

1935 was a hard year for Vallabhbhai. In the summer he contracted jaundice and was laid low for a month. Mohanlal Pandya, without whom there would have been no Kheda stir in 1918 and perhaps no Bardoli in 1928, without whom there might not have been a "Sardar" Patel, died in May. Vallabhbhai mourned deeply. In November he had a piles operation. His nose pestered him throughout but he found no time for the surgery that had been prescribed.

His Gujarat Congress seemed to be losing its cohesion. Chandulal Desai of Bharuch, Patel's companion in Nasik Jail, Darbar Gopaldas of Kheda and Morarji Desai of Bulsar pulled in different directions. Wishing to give more of his own time to other provinces, Vallabhbhai had offered Chandulal the GPCC Presidentship but an outcry ensued. To Chandulal's disappointment, Patel withdrew his offer. Later, some unrecorded remarks made by Morarji bruised Vallabhbhai's feelings and the Sardar contemplated quitting the GPCC. "It hurts me," he wrote to Morarji, "that you have not yet been able to understand me.... I feel that only if I leave my official post will you come to know me."²¹ The Raj's intelligence department noted "discord in the Congress High Command in Gujarat" and ascribed it to Patel's "autocratic and high handed manners",²² but Vallabhbhai's colleagues did not allow him to carry out his threat.

The giving and taking of injury is part and almost the essence of life. In April 1935, during a visit to U.P., Vallabhbhai cracked a joke about Jayaprakash Narayan, one of the founders of the CSP and its first secretary, whose wife Prabhavati, daughter of Braj Kishore Prasad, a venerable Congressman of Bihar, had become friends with Manibehn at Gandhi's Ashram. A salted and peppered account of the joke reached Jayaprakash, who, injured, wrote to Vallabhbhai. The latter replied as follows:

I received today your letter of May 1. My light remark about your marriage was such as I might have made in front of you, without

any fear or hesitation. But I can see from your short letter how wounded you are. I have therefore decided that I must not in future make playful remarks, no matter how innocent, about friends with whose ideas I differ.

You have suffered. I want your forgiveness. Prabha is like my daughter. She is the child of one who is like a real brother to me and for whose virtuous life I have great respect. I have a high regard also for your private life. I don't know how I managed to hurt you, and for no reason. Once more I seek forgiveness.²³

* * *

At the start of the year Patel had fulfilled a delayed tryst with his peasants. For ten days he travelled south to north, from Bulsar to Kheda. Telling the peasants that he wanted to hear personally the story of their sufferings, but offering no apology for his role, he would say in place after place:

I have always told you that it would be no joke to link your fate with mine. I have not hesitated to send you along perilous paths, for we can only obtain lasting peace and joy if we are prepared to suffer hardship.²⁴

A mammoth crowd that greeted him in Bardoli stirred Vallabhbhai, who said:

I may say without the least exaggeration that not a day has passed but I thought of you, your difficulties, your sufferings, and your hardships. I was told that you were angry with me because of the hardships you had to endure and that you were sorry you ever listened to me. I never gave credence to such reports. Someone must have floated these malicious stories to slander you.

In every speech he frontally rejected the line "that we had not gained anything through the struggle". There were two distinct benefits:

The authorities have realized that there exist thousands of men in this country who have made it their life's aim to secure independence regardless of cost. [Secondly,] we have realized how great is the strength of a man's soul.²⁵

Dahyabhai's Bombay flat was Patel's home now, and Manibehn's, but the Sardar was back in Kheda at the end of March 1935, summoned by an outbreak of plague: the pestilence had attacked

Borsad taluka for the fourth successive year. Seized by the Raj in 1932 and handed back in early 1935, Congress's Borsad offices were turned into a temporary hospital. Vallabhbhai camped in Borsad for two months, as did a Bombay doctor, Bhaskar Patel. A local physician, Jivanji Desai, attached himself round the clock to the new hospital, and 65 volunteers turned up, including Manibehn and the wife, four sons and a daughter-in-law of Darbar Gopaldas. Gandhi came and spent some days. Vallabhbhai visited several affected places himself and daily issued a patrika of instruction and advice. The volunteers fanned out into 27 villages, cleaned and sprayed houses, killed flies and trapped rats. Superstition was their toughest foe: for weeks the villagers argued in favour of placating the plague goddess with the blood of goats.

The 27 villages were cleaned up in 53 days. Of the 16 patients admitted into the new hospital, 12 recovered, two died and two left without permission. 2,345 outpatients were treated in April; 3,813 in May. Of the 44 plague patients treated in their own homes by Dr Bhaskar Patel, 31 recovered. Plague never returned to Borsad taluka, but the Raj issued a statement claiming that despite unscientific meddling by Vallabhbhai's team its efforts had defeated the epidemic!²⁶

The British Parliament passed the Government of India Act in August 1935. We have noted its principal features, which were known earlier. In February, at a tete-a-tete that the industrialist, Ghanshyamdas Birla, arranged in his residence in New Delhi, the Raj's Home Member, Sir Henry Craik, had asked Patel about the new Act. Not willing to reveal his mind, Vallabhbhai talked instead about the delay in the return of the ashrams, national schools and centres seized by the Raj in 1932, and about a new punishment given to Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan. Expressing a "very purely personal opinion", Craik admitted that the sentence on Ghaffar Khan "was on the severe side", but the Frontier leader was given no relief.²⁷

Some months later, the Governor of Bombay, Sir Roger Lumley, sought a private meeting with Patel, who by now had replaced an ill Ansari as chairman of the CPB. Agreeing to meet Lumley, he was probed by the Governor. "I have no doubt at all," Lumley ventured, "that you will be the Premier of Bombay." "I won't," Vallabhbhai replied, "I will give it to you in writing." Then Patel brought up the question uppermost on his mind and conscience, the peasants' confiscated lands. "I don't see how those lands can ever be returned," returned Sir Roger. "I will give it to you in writing," rejoined Vallabhbhai, "that the lands will come back to their rightful owners."²⁸ A few years would prove Patel right and Lumley wrong on both counts. Yet Vallabhbhai had refrained from saying that no Congressman would be Bombay's Premier, and his confidence over

the peasants' lands suggested the likelihood of Congress accepting provincial power under the new Act, even though in public Congress leaders were denouncing the Act. Patel himself, for instance, had described it as "a false rupee" with which Congress "will have nothing to do".²⁹ Lumley's probe was not futile.

One of the jolts that Vallabhbhai received in 1935 was a request from C.R. "to be relieved for a good long time if not once and for all".³⁰ Feeling "mentally and physically exhausted", Rajaji informed Patel, Prasad and the Mahatma that he was quitting the AICC, the CPB, the WorCom and the presidency of the Tamil Nad Congress! Vallabhbhai exploded at what came across to him as an inconsiderate and irresponsible step and said to Gandhi that he would resign too. It was "pointless", he told the Mahatma, "for just two or three of us to wear ourselves out".³¹ To C.R. he sent a stinging letter:

*You have done us a great injustice. We all have frail bodies but none of us has the right to leave others in the lurch. What right have you to seek solitude after having made several young men in the country to sacrifice their all? I do not understand you but I know that you are very obstinate.*³²

Patel's threat to resign was a momentary outburst and soon forgotten but he could not shake off a feeling that C.R. had let colleagues down and thrown "an unbearable burden" on them.³³ The Sardar-Rajaji-Prasad trio had constituted a powerful alliance of talents and provinces, cemented by identity of views, loyalty to the Mahatma and comradeship over the years. Vallabhbhai had envisaged a key role for C.R. in the encounters that he expected with the Raj, with the socialists and with Jawaharlal, whose release was near. "It was necessary for some of us" he said in a letter to Gandhi, "to stand alongside one another and work as a team."³⁴ Needled by speculation in a newspaper that C.R.'s departure presaged an exodus of the old guard,³⁵ Patel blamed the Mahatma and Prasad for their failure to prevent Rajaji's withdrawal. More significantly, he extracted C.R.'s consent to continuance on the CPB.

Released early in September, Jawaharlal went at once to Europe, where his wife lay ill. The Congress President's term was soon to end and Gandhi, we know, had Jawahar in mind as Prasad's successor. Vallabhbhai, however, felt that it was Rajaji's turn to get the honour – Jawaharlal had already received it – and communicated his view to Gandhi. It was duly passed on to C.R., who was visiting Gandhi in Wardha in the Central Provinces, Gandhi's base since 1934. Shattering Patel's hope, C.R. told the Mahatma that "it was vain to think that he could be induced to wear the crown of thorns", whereupon the Mahatma wrote a letter to Jawaharlal offering him the Congress crown once more, and a

letter to Vallabhbhai informing him that he had "asked Jawaharlal with Rajaji's consent".³⁶ Nehru accepted the offer.

Though he had wished to see C.R. rather than Jawaharlal in Congress's chair in 1936, Patel was not blind to Jawaharlal's qualities. Addressing a peasants' conference in Allahabad in the summer of 1935, when Nehru was still in jail, he had said:

*No one has rendered as much service to the peasants as Pandit Jawaharlalji and his sick wife have. For your sakes he has sacrificed a life of comfort and readily shared your troubles. Your poverty infuriates him. How can we move a step forward without his help?*³⁷

Vallabhbhai had not liked Gandhi's move to Wardha, where Jamnalal Bajaj was the Mahatma's host. The town seemed a backwater to him, the summer there was long and hot, and he termed it "that pit".³⁸ Worst of all, Wardha was far from where Patel was. He became angrier when Gandhi shifted a few miles beyond Wardha to an arid village that Bajaj made over to him, Segaon, or Sevagram, as it was soon called, which had no telephone, post office or road. Yet their tie was intact. The Mahatma would search for a letter from Vallabhbhai in the post brought from Wardha. In December 1935, when Gandhi was quite ill and his doctors had banned letter-writing, a note from Vallabhbhai that Mahadev read out stirred him and he insisted on getting up and writing his first letter in four days.³⁹ Gandhi's illness continuing, Patel fetched him from Wardha, had him examined in Bombay and took him to the Vidyapith in Ahmedabad for a month's total rest, with the Sardar serving as the Mahatma's watchman and shutting out visitors.

A sum of money that the Mahatma had hoped to collect in two weeks for his Harijan cause was obtained by Vallabhbhai in two days. He had rich friends in Bombay, men such as Walchand Hirachand and the Birla brothers, Rameshwardas and Ghanshyamdas; they often saw him and at times accompanied him on his early morning walks; he sought their help whenever Gandhi or Congress needed it; but Patel's code forbade assistance to himself or his family, and his wealthy friends knew better than to offer it. His own minimal needs were met by Dahyabhai's income and Manibehn's labour.

C.R., his spirits and health restored by a six-month holiday, raised with Gandhi the differences between Vallabhbhai, the chairman of the CPB, and Jawaharlal, the President-designate.

I was and still am doubtful about Jawaharlal's fitting in with the parliamentary programme and policy, [even though] I readily agreed that on personal and general grounds we could not pitch on a better choice for the Congress president's place this year.

*Something should be done by you to see that Vallabhbhai's decisions as regards parliamentary policy are not challenged but given full cooperation from the Working Committee and by the Congress President.*⁴⁰

Congress's Lucknow session, held in March-April 1936, revealed that Jawaharlal would rather fit in than break. After a long illness, his wife Kamala had died in Europe in February. Sympathy was joined to the affection that India felt for her husband. In Lucknow Nehru extolled socialism as a vital creed which he held with all his head and heart and made plain his sharp dislike of the idea of office-acceptance, but he was unwilling to divide the house on either issue. Refusing to join the CSP, Jawaharlal also went along with Lucknow's decision not to reject office in advance.

Though "an acrimonious verbal duel" between Patel and Jawaharlal was witnessed in Lucknow,⁴¹ the two were not as deeply divided as the Raj hoped or as some in Congress feared. As Jawaharlal was to put it shortly after Lucknow, "Our points of agreement were more numerous than our points of disagreement."⁴² That freedom had to come first and Gandhi was indispensable were two fundamentals on which Vallabhbhai and Jawaharlal were agreed. The composition of Nehru's WorCom supplied clinching proof of his willingness to fit in. According to Kripalani, the Mahatma had asked Jawaharlal to consult Patel and Prasad before choosing his team.⁴³ Though the new WorCom included three socialists, Narendra Dev, Jayaprakash and Achyut Patwardhan, as well as Subhas Bose – who was once more in prison, this time for returning to India against the Raj's wishes –, it was dominated by ten of the old guard, led by Vallabhbhai, Rajaji and Prasad, and Kripalani continued as General Secretary. It was a team that Gandhi would himself have chosen, and in fact the three socialists on it "owed their appointment not to Jawaharlal but to Gandhi".⁴⁴

Soon, however, a conflict arose over Nehru's "preaching and emphasising of socialism" in his speeches and a remark by him that he had consented to the WorCom's composition "against his better judgment"⁴⁵. Patel objected to the President championing a creed "which the Congress has not accepted"⁴⁶ and to the comment on the WorCom. Five other WorCom members, including Prasad and Rajaji, shared Vallabhbhai's reaction, and the six sent in their resignation through Prasad.

Though Prasad acted as the group's spokesman, Patel was its moving force. He told Prasad that Jawaharlal's remark about the WorCom had left them in "a humiliating position in which I for one would not agree to stay at any cost".⁴⁷ Vallabhbhai "often found Jawaharlal Nehru's attitude irritating, but he knew the art of

disagreeing with Nehru by action rather than by words".⁴⁸ On his part, Nehru found it hard to "suppress" his beliefs⁴⁹ but he was also being taunted by divisive admirers. Rafi Ahmed Kidwai of the U.P., for instance, had accused Jawaharlal of choosing a WorCom "more reactionary than the one it has replaced".⁵⁰

Jawaharlal's reaction to the resignations and Prasad's letter was to offer to resign himself but Gandhi intervened and all resignations and offers to resign were withdrawn. "I look upon the whole affair as a tragicomedy," the Mahatma told Nehru, asking him not to compel the AICC to choose between him and his colleagues. Added Gandhi: "If they are guilty of intolerance, you have more than your share of it. The country should not be made to suffer for your mutual intolerance."⁵¹ Six weeks after the crisis, Patel, Nehru and the rest agreed Congress's manifesto for the provincial elections of early 1937.

*Patel to Gandhi, 26.8.36: We have been getting on beautifully this time....It has been more like a gathering of family members. The manifesto was prepared and passed almost unanimously....I cannot speak too highly of Jawaharlal. We found not the slightest difficulty in cooperating with him.*⁵²

An attack of pneumonia had downed Vallabhbhai in March; he spent a fortnight resting in Birla House in New Delhi. Following the Lucknow session he suffered a relapse. Reciprocating Patel's service earlier in the year, Gandhi took his friend to the Nandi Hills near Bangalore for a month's rest in May. At the end of July Vallabhbhai finally had his nose operated upon in a Bombay hospital. He emerged from it with a new countenance: his drooping moustache had been taken off for the surgery. Patel never revived it. Asked about the missing component, he would say, "I have become a socialist," an allusion to the smooth upper lips, on the whole, of a tribe much on his mind.⁵³

In September 1936 he had a tiff with Jamnalal Bajaj. The issue was Vallabhbhai's wish to have Ghanshyamdas Birla invited to Wardha, where the Sardar had gone to meet Gandhi. Bajaj discouraged the idea. His rooms, he said, were full; besides, he added, another arrival would tax Gandhi, who was unwell. However, a telegram inviting Birla went under the Mahatma's signature. Suspecting Patel's hand, a furious Bajaj refused to accept Vallabhbhai's statement that he had had nothing to do with the wire to Birla.

Patel to Bajaj, 7.9.36: You did not accept my word, and even when I took Mahadev to you, so that he could confirm it, you did not let go of your suspicion against me. Your attitude of retaining

suspicion and not believing the word of those who are like blood brothers has deeply saddened me.

*Bajaj to Patel, 8.9.36: It is true that the thought entered my mind that you put your interests first and disregarded the difficulties of others. The thought also came that when you want something done, you use Bapu's name. Perhaps I was mistaken or to blame in this but I am informing you of the state of my mind at the time.*⁵⁴

However, by January the two were cooperating to ensure Congress's victory in the provincial elections due in the spring of 1937.

* * *

Congress needed a President for 1937. He would take over at a session in December 1936 in the Maharashtra village of Faizpur. Jawaharlal let it be known that he was ready to accept another term. Though Nehru had added that he would extend his "complete cooperation" to anyone else who was chosen, Vallabhbhai was offended by Jawahar's apparent willingness to continue indefinitely as President. To Mahadev he wrote: "The decked-up groom-prince is ready to marry at one stroke as many girls as he can find."⁵⁵ Once more Patel tried to induce C.R. to accept the office: Jawaharlal was sure to withdraw if C.R. was interested. At Vallabhbhai's instance the Mahatma wrote to Rajaji:

*The Sardar is desperately anxious for you to wear the thorny crown. I shall be pleased if you will, but I have no heart to press it on you. If you [can] be persuaded into shouldering the burden, you should unhesitatingly say yes and end the agony of the Sardar.*⁵⁶

Once more C.R. let Patel down. Vallabhbhai next proposed Govind Ballabh Pant of the U.P. In a letter to Mahadev he said:

*How about Pantji? Bapu had mentioned his name at one point. You can raise it with him. As far as I am concerned, I would break loose and quit if he (Jawaharlal) continues. Jivat (Kripalani) too is very cut up.*⁵⁷

Several Congressmen wanted Patel to be the next President, the more so as Jawaharlal had said that those considering him for another term should "bear in mind" that he was a socialist.⁵⁸ Though ready for a contest with Nehru, Vallabhbhai was not prepared to divide Congress three months before the elections. Kripalani has related what happened:

Jawaharlal approached Gandhiji and told him that he felt that one term of 8 months was not sufficient for him to revitalise the Congress. He would like a second term of office.... Gandhiji remained thoughtful for some time. Then he said, "I shall see what can be done." I was present when the conversation between Gandhiji and Jawaharlal took place.

In pursuance of Jawaharlal's talks with Gandhiji regarding a second term, Gandhiji asked Sardar to withdraw, which he did.⁵⁹

A familiar story was thus re-enacted. As before, however, there would be stipulations: Patel would continue as chairman of the CPB and conduct the elections and the selections; Jawaharlal's reappointment would not mean, his "bear-in-mind" remark notwithstanding, that Congress had endorsed socialism, or that it was committed to rejecting provincial power, or that the Presidency was much more than a chairmanship. The statement in which Vallabhbhai announced that he was standing down spelt out some of these terms. It was based on a draft that Gandhi had sent.

Gandhi to Patel, 24.11.36: *If you do not like the draft, write out another, and if you think it your duty to enter into competition, do so. You may change the draft where you think it necessary. Whatever you do must be done with confidence, because we shall have to cross many deserts.*⁶⁰

Vallabhbhai did not think it his duty either to compete against Jawaharlal for votes or to carry out the threat to quit. But the statement he issued was forthright:

After consultations with friends, I have come to the conclusion that I must withdraw from the contest....At this critical juncture, a unanimous election is most desirable.

My withdrawal should not be taken to mean that I endorse all the views Jawaharlalji stands for. Indeed, Congressmen know that on some vital matters my views are in conflict with those held by Jawaharlalji. For instance, I do not believe in the inevitability of class war.

[Also], I can visualise the occasion when the acceptance of office may be desirable to achieve the common purpose. There may then be a sharp division of opinion between Jawaharlalji and myself.

We know Jawaharlalji to be too loyal to the Congress to disregard the decision of the majority.

The Congress President has no dictatorial powers. He is the chairman of a well-knit organisation....The Congress does not part

*with its ample powers by electing any individual no matter who he is.*⁶¹

Accepting the terms, Jawaharlal clarified that "it would be absurd for me to treat this presidential election as a vote for socialism or against office-acceptance".⁶² "Nehru to attract the masses and secure their votes, and Patel to control the ministries after winning the elections – such was the division of labour inside the Congress." This summation of Namboodiripad, the Communist leader, is correct.⁶³ Vallabhbhai and Jawaharlal hurt each other in 1936 and entertained hard thoughts about each other. Even so, they fell in with a larger design in which their roles became complementary rather than conflicting, enabling Gandhi to say at Congress's end-1936 Faizpur session: "I have cast all my cares on the broad shoulders of Jawaharlal and the Sardar."⁶⁴

Jawaharlal "shot through the country like an arrow"⁶⁵ and sought the votes of the masses. Patel also travelled extensively and addressed election meetings, but his main roles were to mediate or arbitrate disputes over the selection of Congress candidates, and to collect and distribute funds. The roles were bluntly played: "A sleek-looking England-returned individual called on the Sardar at Surat and said he hoped for a ticket. The Sardar inspected him from top to toe, said, 'You won't suit us', and moved to the next visitor."⁶⁶

Congress swept the polls, winning an absolute majority in five of the eleven provinces – the U.P., Bihar, Madras, C.P. and Orissa – , and emerging as the largest party in Bombay, Bengal, Assam and the N.W.F.P. Having won the votes, would Congress take ministerial seats? Jawaharlal "forced through a resolution in the (U.P.) provincial Congress committee against the acceptance of office",⁶⁷ but Vallabhbhai, despite his denunciation of the 1935 Act, wanted Congress to seize the considerable powers it offered. Yet Nehru was the President, and Congress was committed to "wrecking" the Act. Patel did not himself confront Jawaharlal. That would have only made Jawaharlal more uncompromising. Vallabhbhai's partners made the running. Elected leader of Congress's legislators in the Madras Assembly, which he had been persuaded by Patel to enter, Rajaji advocated acceptance of office. So did several of Congress's provincial committees and all the newly elected legislature parties.

Opposition to office was reiterated by Jawaharlal when Congress's legislators and the AICC gathered in New Delhi in March, but it was clear that a large majority disagreed with him. Gandhi, the tribune, said he would counsel acceptance provided the Raj gave an assurance that Governors would not use their special powers to override Ministers. Sapru, the constitutional lawyer, said that the assurance

sought was "fantastic"⁶⁸ and would contravene the 1935 Act but the Raj met the Mahatma half way. Lord Linlithgow, the Viceroy, declared that

*There is no foundation for any suggestion that the Governor is free, or entitled, or would have the power to interfere with the day-to-day administration of a province outside the limited range of responsibilities specially confided to him.*⁶⁹

Treating the statement as "a sign from Britain that it would cooperate",⁷⁰ the Mahatma advised Congress to accept office. When the WorCom conferred in the first week of July, nobody, not even Jawaharlal, opposed the advice. By the middle of July, Congress Ministries were formed in seven provinces, followed by an eighth a year later. Vallabhbhai, Jawaharlal and Prasad kept out of them but Rajaji became Premier of Madras. Pant headed the U.P. Ministry, Shrikrishna Sinha the one in Bihar, N. B. Khare in the C.P., Dr. Khan Sahib in the N.W.F.P., Bishwanath Das in Orissa, Gopinath Bardoloi in Assam and B.G. Kher in Bombay.

* * *

The Premiership of Bombay had been coveted by K. F. Nariman, an able left-leaning Parsi lawyer who headed Congress in Bombay city and was elected to the new Assembly from one of the city's segments. Parsis and Parsi-owned journals supported his aspiration and so did a number of non-Parsis, but not Patel, whose assessment was influenced by his memory of Nariman's role in the 1934 elections to the Central Assembly. Selected as a Congress candidate against Sir Cowasji Jehangir, an eminent and influential Parsi, Nariman had suddenly and at the last minute withdrawn his nomination; though K. M. Munshi was hurriedly drafted to fight in Nariman's place, Congress lost the seat. Confident, however, of his standing in Bombay city, and taking Vallabhbhai for granted, Nariman expected, in 1937, to be named Congress's leader in the Assembly.

When he realized, late in the day, that Patel was interesting himself in the choice, Nariman approached him. Recalling the 1934 episode, Vallabhbhai told Nariman, on March 4, that he could not support his candidacy; however, added Patel, "he did not intend to work actively against him".⁷¹ Nariman, who had no intention of being inactive in his own cause, managed to gather impressive support. Thirty MLAs elected from the Marathi-speaking districts met in Poona on March 8, resolved that office should be accepted and "decided that they would elect Nariman as the Chief Minister".⁷² Three days later, however, the MLAs learnt from three prominent Congressmen of the

presidency, Gangadharrao Deshpande, who headed Congress in the presidency's Kannada districts, Shankarrao Deo, president of the Maharashtra Congress, and Achyut Patwardhan, the socialist, that the Sardar preferred Kher to Nariman. The three had urged Patel to lead the legislature party himself, but he declined. On March 12 the presidency's Congress legislators met and unanimously elected Kher.

At first Nariman pledged his "wholehearted and devoted cooperation"⁷³ to Kher, but journals championing his cause launched a campaign against Vallabhbhai, who was accused of communal bias and of having exercised improper pressure on the MLAs. Nariman, who had spent some days with Patel during the Bardoli struggle, exonerated the Sardar of the communal charge but repeated the accusation of undue pressure. The attacks by Nariman and the pro-Nariman journals continued for several months, wounded Vallabhbhai's feelings and angered him. Gandhi had urged him not to "lose his patience or peace of mind" over "any sort of attack"⁷⁴ but the advice was hard to follow in its entirety. Patel's "peace of mind" was destroyed by the virulence of the attacks but he did not lose his patience. Only one statement was issued by him in reply, and that too at Gandhi's urging. Dignity demanded silence. Moreover, as Vallabhbhai told a correspondent of the *Tribune* of Lahore, "Nariman belonged to a small and sensitive minority"; he did not want to add to the unhappiness the Parsis were nursing.⁷⁵

The charge of improper pressure was finally referred, with the consent of Patel and Nariman both, to Gandhi and a former Advocate-General of Bombay, D. N. Bahadurji; the two arbitrators were also asked to go into Nariman's 1934 action. Bahadurji, a Parsi, held that Nariman had hurt Congress by his 1934 role and that the choice of Kher "was not made under any undue pressure from" Vallabhbhai.⁷⁶ Gandhi concurred with both findings. Nariman accepted the verdict but recanted within a week, claiming that his acceptance was offered "at a time of mental depression".⁷⁷ The WorCom declared, in consequence, that Nariman was "unworthy of holding any position of trust and responsibility in the Congress organisation";⁷⁸ he had to leave his city Congress chair.

Unsteady as he was, Nariman possessed flair and a record of standing up to the Raj which ensured a residue of sympathy for him, and the prolonged press campaign helped create the image of an unfeeling Sardar Patel who destroyed political careers. We have seen that Vallabhbhai was hurt by the propaganda that fashioned this image. After Bahadurji had vindicated him, S. K. Patil, secretary of the city Congress at the time, saw Patel's "moist" eyes,⁷⁹ and the Mahatma noted "the amount of restraint" that Vallabhbhai had shown.⁸⁰ Yet the iron man image was not wholly a handicap. It quickened compliance and saved Patel time and energy.

Nariman probably spoke the truth when he said that 'but for Vallabhbhai he would have become the Bombay Premier. Patel, on the other hand, did not describe the literal truth, and confused intention with effect, in asserting that he had "never, directly or indirectly, influenced this election".⁸¹ The MLAs were plainly influenced by Vallabhbhai's preference, which was unfortunate from Nariman's standpoint, but Patel had committed no impropriety. Nariman's mistake, and the source of his unhappiness, was to day-dream without reckoning with Vallabhbhai. In the Bombay of 1937, it was a lapse that only an absent-minded Congressman could make. Ten years later, when Patel was India's Deputy Prime Minister, Nariman apologized to him, rejoined Congress and headed its group in the Bombay Corporation. Very soon, however, on October 4, 1948, Nariman died of heart failure at Maiden's Hotel in Delhi, where he had gone for a legal case. At the request of Nariman's relations, the Sardar "arranged for his body to be brought to Bombay in a special plane";⁸² and he recalled that Nariman was, for a period, "the uncrowned king of Bombay".⁸³ The 1937 episode did not colour Vallabhbhai's tribute.

* * *

Another Bombay resident, Jinnah, was as alive as Patel to the opportunities of power. Led by him, the Muslim League had in 1937 won 20 of the 30 Muslim seats in the Bombay Assembly and 108 seats in the country as a whole. In May, Jinnah sent a feeler to Gandhi about "Hindu-Muslim unity". Congress-League coalitions were in his mind. These would have given Jinnah a say in every provincial ministry, reduced the discretion of Congress's Premiers and undercut the influence of Vallabhbhai, Jawaharlal and Azad. Gandhi did not take up Jinnah's offer. Congress was yet to decide about office.

In July, when it became clear that Congress would form ministries, Jinnah renewed his bid and separately told Kher and Munshi, Minister for Law and Order in the Kher cabinet, that "we" – meaning the Congress and the League – "should work together". Jinnah, Kher and Munshi knew one another well; all three were prominent in the Bombay Bar. Munshi recalls: "Sir Cowasji Jehangir formally approached Sardar and Maulana on Jinnah's behalf....Kher and myself were present on several occasions when the discussions took place."⁸⁴ Through Cowasji, Jinnah proposed the inclusion of two League Ministers in the Bombay cabinet.

Patel said he would agree to it if the League legislators first merged with Congress. To this Jinnah's reply, sent via Cowasji, was that he would only accept a coalition between two separate parties, and the talks broke down. A coalition bid was also made in the U.P. Initiated

by the League's leader in that province, Khaliquzzaman, the U.P. talks were disliked by Jinnah. These also collapsed, because – says Khaliquzzaman – Azad insisted on merger. Providing another (and less factual) explanation, Azad has claimed that the U.P. talks failed because Jawaharlal, intervening unexpectedly, reduced Congress's offer from two cabinet seats for the League to one.⁸⁵

In any case, ministries were formed without the League, an exclusion favoured by both Patel and Nehru but seen by more than one observer as being decisive in turning India's Muslims in the direction of Pakistan. Thus Pyarelal, Gandhi's secretary and biographer, calls it "a tactical error of the first magnitude" and a "decision of the Congress High Command taken against Gandhi's best judgment";⁸⁶ Penderel Moon, who served with the ICS before and after freedom, thinks that "the prime cause of the creation of Pakistan" was Congress's failure to cooperate with the League in 1937; and Frank Moraes has argued that "Pakistan might never have come into being" had "Congress handled the League more tactfully after the (1937) elections".⁸⁷ Munshi, on the other hand, is not alone when he speaks of the "correct decision of the Congress leaders": In his view, League Ministers in a Congress-League coalition would have been "at the disposal of Jinnah to obstruct, defy or sabotage and, by using veto, blackmail the Congress into submission".⁸⁸

This was not true of the U.P. It was not because of Jinnah but in spite of him that the leaders of the U.P. League had made a move towards Congress; and they continued to negotiate with Congress even after Jinnah had asked them not to. They would not have been at "Jinnah's disposal" had a coalition with Congress come about.⁸⁹ But the Bombay Leaguers would; and to argue that the coalition would have worked in Bombay is also to claim that Congress and Jinnah would have collaborated without friction. This was an improbability – a sharp, open clash between Jawaharlal and Jinnah in January 1937 was only one pointer – , and a principle was also involved. None in the Congress High Command, not even Vallabhbhai, could accept Jinnah's view that Congress was to Hindus what the League was to Muslims.

The coalition gamble was rejected by Patel and his colleagues, and cohesion was preferred. An unintended fruit was a chance for Jinnah that he was quick to seize upon. Within months of Congress assuming power, he said: "All along the countryside, many of the ten thousand Congress committees and even some of the Hindu officials are behaving as if Hindu Raj had already been established."⁹⁰ Hindu Raj was neither Congress's wish nor India's reality but it became the Muslim perception.

In September Vallabhbhai invited Jawaharlal to Gujarat and presented him with a handsome Gujarati contribution for a hospital in Kamala Nehru's name.

*Gandhi to Patel, 26.9.37: What really surprises me is that you did not break down during this strenuous tour lasting five days. When two hard-working types get together, they wear each other out. Weak and thin people generally manage quite well in each other's company. A strong man has some consideration for a feeble companion. But when you two got together, there was no telling which of you was tougher. Your tour must have been remarkable.*⁹¹

Yet the Vallabhbhai-Jawaharlal relationship nearly broke down towards the end of the year. At issue was the Congress Ministries' stand on law and order. Nehru accused Munshi, Bombay's Law Minister, of having "already become a police officer"⁹² because Munshi had not, in his first month in office, cancelled curbs on the activities of some twenty Communists. Patel asked Munshi to be guided by his own convictions, not by Jawaharlal's temper, and the Mahatma gave identical advice. Also disliked by Nehru was a decision of the Bombay Ministry to provide police protection to workers not heeding a Communist call for lightning strikes.

After S. S. Batlivala, a Bombay socialist, was arrested in Vellore in Madras presidency for incitement to violence, Jawaharlal felt he had to draw a line. He proposed a rule requiring a provincial ministry to consult the WorCom before making arrests of the Batlivala kind. C.R. opposed the proposal, and Vallabhbhai fully backed him. So did Gandhi, and the WorCom turned it down. The policy of non-intervention by Congress in the affairs of princely states found Nehru again at odds with Patel, who agreed with Gandhi that the rulers of these states should not be pushed into the Raj's arms. If a ruler's ways called for a struggle, his subjects should launch it, not Congress. Jawaharlal sought a change in this policy but was outvoted once more in the WorCom.

Jawaharlal "decided" to resign from the WorCom but did not. While telling Gandhi that he "felt out of place and a misfit",⁹³ Nehru could not, in the end, break with him. Vallabhbhai and Jawaharlal stood, in these disputes, on opposing sides, yet Nehru traded words not with Patel but with Gandhi, Rajaji and the Bombay Ministry. Vallabhbhai's sympathies were plain for all to see, and his hand went up unmistakably whenever votes were counted, yet he knew the value of silence and the cost of unnecessary speech.

As before, the other man's health was a subject in almost every letter exchanged between Patel and the Mahatma. The Sardar would throw a peasant proverb at Gandhi – "The slow cart lasts

long’’⁹⁴ – and the Mahatma, on his part, would complain: “You are driving too hard, but who can reprimand or bring the Sardar to book?”⁹⁵ Along with one of his letters to Gandhi Vallabhbhai sent a tough Babul thorn that had entered his foot and found a week’s lodging inside. Patel’s dislike of Sevagram persisted, and the Mahatma disapproved of a press statement by Vallabhbhai in reply to criticisms from a trade union leader, R. S. Nimbkar. “I did not like it at all,” Gandhi wrote to Patel. “I can see much intolerance in it.... I am afraid you have invited antagonism.”⁹⁶

The question of a Congress President for 1938 found the two disagreeing. Gandhi had thought of Subhas, who was released in March 1937, but Vallabhbhai questioned Subhas’s balance. “I have seen that Subhas is unsteady,” Gandhi replied, “but no one except him can be the President.”⁹⁷ Subhas was duly installed. Yet the Gandhi-Patel relationship was as close and strong as ever. A letter that Gandhi wrote when Vallabhbhai’s oldest brother Somabhai died confirms that at its heart the tie was fraternal, and it hints at the Yeravda pact of simultaneous departure. Said the Mahatma, (15.7.37): “You seem to be sending your brothers away....They will keep our own places ready somewhere. When God feels that our work here is done, He will take us away in a moment.”⁹⁸ With Somabhai’s going, only two of the six children of Motakaka and Ladba were alive: Vallabhbhai, who was close to 62, and Kashibhai.

* * *

Congress’s next session, held in February 1938, was Patel’s handiwork. He chose a village in Bardoli taluka for the exercise, Haripura on the banks of the Tapti. About five hundred acres of open space lent by Hindu and Muslim villagers lodged around 75,000 men and women. Gandhi had urged Vallabhbhai not to spend more than Rs 5,000 on the session; the Sardar replied that he was ready to spend Rs 5 lakhs. Roads were done up. A pontoon bridge was laid. Tractors levelled ground. Five hundred cows were brought to the site a month in advance so that condensed milk and ghee could be made. A waterworks, a printing press and a garden emerged. So did a hospital, a bank, a post and telegraph office, a telephone exchange, buses and a fire engine! About a lakh of rupees went as wages to peasants and labourers of the neighbourhood. Remembering his brother, Vallabhbhai gave the name Vithal Nagar to the temporary town-in-a-village.

Nandalal Bose journeyed from Santiniketan and did 200 paintings on the site. Gujarat’s artists, Ravishankar Raval and Kanu Desai, offered their creations. The cottage of Subhas Bose, the President, was erected on ground that sloped down to the river. From it Subhas

enjoyed a beautiful view of the water and of trees beyond it. His WorCom colleagues and the Mahatma were housed in adjacent cottages. Villagers came to Vithal Nagar in their thousands and paid six pice (a tenth of a rupee) each for their lunch. Two thousand volunteers ran the kitchens and kept the sanitary areas clean. "The Sardar has built a magnificent town," commented Jawaharlal.⁹⁹

A sandstorm, a cold wave and rain attacked Vithal Nagar but the tents and bamboo structures held out. A volunteer was, however, drowned in the Tapti. Patel was moved by a bhajan that his and Gandhi's friend, Pandit Narayan Moreshwar Khare, sang at the volunteer's cremation;¹⁰⁰ and he was moved again when, a few days later, the Pandit himself died of pneumonia. The bhajan's opening line, "Mangal Mandir Kholo", would be on Vallabhbhai's lips during his own last days.

The relationship between Haripura's builder and its President seemed free of friction and consensus marked the session's decisions. While princely rulers were advised to understand the times they were living in, their subjects were told that Congressmen were willing, "in their personal capacity", to guide them.¹⁰¹ But the strategy of avoiding a direct clash between Congress and the princes was reaffirmed. So was Congress's policy towards the Raj. Patel spelt it out in one of his Haripura speeches:

*We have not accepted office in order to carry out a few reforms. We accepted office with a view to moving on towards a far greater thing, Complete Independence. If by accepting office our ability to move towards that goal is increased, well and good. But if we find that our final goal is jeopardized, we must immediately give up office.*¹⁰²

Vallabhbhai had exerted himself to reduce opposition. Two months before the session he had written to Prasad: "Nariman has joined hands with the Communists at Bombay, though not yet openly.... The socialists are mobilising. Please see that in the selection of delegates [you] eliminate all anti-Gandhi elements.... The time has come for a definite stand."¹⁰³ No clash occurred at Haripura but the Sardar and the socialists could not avoid irritating one another.

*Gandhi to Patel, 20.2.38: Devadas complained against your speech today. Then Jayaprakash came and spoke about it in great distress. I think your speech was unduly severe. You cannot win over the socialists like that.... We should never return blow for blow.*¹⁰⁴

Subhas's WorCom, chosen at Haripura with Gandhi's help and that of Vallabhbhai, contained no socialist. A socialist member of the

previous WorCom, Achyut Patwardhan, was, however, struck by a Vallabhbhai gesture: "The Sardar came over to see my mother in Haripura and asked if she was well looked after."¹⁰⁵ Another socialist, Minoo Masani, had expected to be named to the WorCom. When he complained to Gandhi about his exclusion, the Mahatma told him, "Vallabhbhai says you supported Nariman." "I was neutral over Nariman," Masani protested. Tackled by the Mahatma, Patel took back the pro-Nariman charge but added that appointing Masani would weaken S. K. Patil in Bombay. Relaying Vallabhbhai's "real reason", Gandhi told Masani: "Sardar has nothing in his heart against you. His tongue is thorny but his bark is worse than his bite."¹⁰⁶

"Sardar and I are close to each other, we are as one, we work alike and we think alike," the Mahatma said at Haripura.¹⁰⁷

* * *

As chairman of Congress's Parliamentary Board, Patel exercised "central" supervision over Congress's provincial ministries. This encroachment on a legislature's powers could not be helped. Congress's provincial units were part of an all-India fighting machine and needed a central authority. The Raj recognized this and Linlithgow, the Viceroy, noted in the summer of 1938 that Vallabhbhai was "a figure of growing importance".¹⁰⁸

In order to make it difficult for the Raj to divide-and-rule, Patel enjoined that only a Premier should deal with the Governor; other ministers could meet the Governor only with the Premier's consent. Another rule barred ministers and MLAs from attending functions in honour of Governors or other British officials. "No discourtesy was intended," Vallabhbhai pointed out, but Congress had to safeguard its purity.¹⁰⁹ Lest acceptance of office degenerated into its worship, ceilings were fixed. No minister could draw a salary of more than Rs 500 a month or a conveyance allowance of more than Rs 250 a month.

The installation of Congress Ministries represented, in Gandhi's words, "an unwritten compact between the British Government and the Congress,... a gentleman's agreement, in which both are expected to play the game."¹¹⁰ Patel felt that the Raj was flouting the game's rules when it announced that J. R. Dain, Orissa's Revenue Commissioner, would officiate for four months as the province's Governor while Hubback, the incumbent, was on leave. The idea of an officer who was subordinate to Orissa's Congress Ministers suddenly acquiring authority over them was unacceptable to Vallabhbhai. He instructed the Orissa Ministry to resign the day Dain assumed office. Adding his word to Patel's, Gandhi declared that the Congress "could not allow the appointment to pass unchallenged",¹¹¹

and the Raj chose to retreat. Hubback withdrew his application for leave and resigned himself to another summer in Orissa!

The Raj had earlier offended Vallabhbhai by its attitude towards a batch of U.P. and Bihar prisoners convicted for political violence. Accepting the prisoners' claim that they had lost faith in violence, the U.P. and Bihar Ministries had ordered their release towards the end of 1937 but the Governors stood in the way. "How dare a Governor interfere with the discretionary right of our ministries?" Patel thundered, adding, "It is a question of self-respect."¹¹² Pant, the U.P. Premier, reacted weakly to the curb on his powers, and Vallabhbhai tried to toughen him. "Why does [Pant] not resist and take a bold step?" he remarked.¹¹³ After this, and on receiving identical advice from Gandhi, Pant submitted his Ministry's resignation. Shrikrishna Sinha, the Bihar Premier, did likewise.

The Raj hesitated. It wanted neither to break with the Congress nor to yield to it. The resignations were not immediately accepted and there was a flurry of telegrams between Lucknow and New Delhi, between Patna and New Delhi, and between New Delhi and London. While the Raj cogitated, with Zetland, the Secretary of State, taking the view that the risk involved in releasing the prisoners was not so great as to justify raising "a serious constitutional issue", Gandhi made a conciliatory statement. "The crisis could be avoided," he said, "if the Governors were left free to give an assurance that their examination of cases was not intended to be usurpation of the powers of the ministries."¹¹⁴ The assurance was given the next day and the prisoners were released.

In addition to being the CPB chairman, Patel had direct charge of Congress's parliamentary affairs in Bombay, Madras, the Central Provinces (C.P.) and Sind. His colleagues on the CPB, Prasad and Azad, were also assigned provinces: Bihar, Orissa and Assam went to Prasad, and U.P., Bengal, Punjab and the N.W.F.P. to Azad. As far as Madras was concerned, Vallabhbhai's role began and ended with the appointment as Premier of Rajaji, who was left free to govern the southern presidency as he liked. Patel guided the Bombay Ministry, in the words of Morarji Desai, the Revenue Minister, "as regards principles and proper procedures" but "never interfered in its day-to-day work".¹¹⁵

In Vallabhbhai's view, the Bombay Ministry's first obligation was to the Gujarat peasants whose lands had been seized and sold in the disobedience of the early thirties. His pledge to the valiant peasants was redeemed in 1938 by an Act of the Bombay Government. Learning from Ashabhai Patel that Ras was going to celebrate the return of its lands with a festival, a relieved yet ever-practical Sardar wrote back: "Find out and let me know if anyone's land has been overlooked in the official declaration."¹¹⁶ Vallabhbhai's other

messages to the Bombay Ministry reveal the pure nationalist. He was indignant when an Englishman was appointed headmaster of a Bombay school; and on another occasion, when a question of electrifying large parts of Gujarat came up, Patel told Premier Kher that "it would be a great misfortune for the Congress government if a foreign company succeeds in obtaining a licence". The licence went to an Indian company.¹¹⁷ In Sind, where Congress was not in power, Vallabhbhai's instructions to Congress MLAs were to treat the Ministry's measures on merits.

* * *

Congress had a large majority in the only other province in Patel's direct care, C.P., but here Vallabhbhai had to reckon with a proud man with a weakness for office. Narayan Bhaskar Khare of Nagpur, a physician and Congressman of some repute and Premier of C.P. from July 1937, ended by abandoning Congress for the Raj. Though Congress had 43 Hindi-speaking MLAs in the C.P. Assembly as against 27 Marathi-speaking ones, rivalry between the chief spokesman of the Hindi region, Ravi Shankar Shukla, and another prominent MLA from the Hindi districts, Dwarka Prasad Mishra, had enabled Khare, a Maharashtrian, to be chosen the party leader. Patel had no objection to Khare's election and offered him his "good wishes, full support and sympathy".¹¹⁸ On his part Khare assured Vallabhbhai that "any instructions which you will be pleased to issue will be faithfully followed".¹¹⁹ At Patel's instance, Shukla and Mishra were taken into Khare's ministry but a Hindi-Marathi divide soon revealed itself in the C.P. Assembly. It also became plain that Khare and Shukla were at loggerheads; and an insecure Khare moved closer to the Governor, Sir Hyde Gowan. As Mishra would afterwards allege, "the Governor started the practice of calling [Khare] frequently to Government House and obtaining his previous approval on important matters"¹²⁰

In March 1938 Khare blundered. He looked the other way when his Law Minister, Mohammed Yusuf Shareef, unwisely ordered the premature release of four men, all Muslims, who had been convicted in a case of rape of a Harijan girl. There was an outcry and Vallabhbhai wrote to Khare asking for Shareef's explanation. Khare disliked Patel's "interference". After getting Shareef to apologize to the Congress party in the Assembly, and the party to "forgive" Shareef, Khare informed Vallabhbhai that the chapter was closed, but the chairman of the CPB was far from satisfied. At Patel's urging, the WorCom asked a retired judge of the Calcutta High Court, Sir Manmath Nath Mukherji, to go into Shareef's order.

On May 7 Mukherji pronounced that Shareef's "grave error of judgment" had led to a miscarriage of justice, and Khare's stock crashed.¹²¹ Next day four of his colleagues, Shukla, Mishra, D. K. Mehta and P. B. Gole, gave him their resignations. Erring again, Khare took his troubles not to Vallabhbhai or the CPB or the WorCom but to the Raj. He told the acting Governor, Hugh Bomford (Gowan had left because of illness), that "he had the support of 31 MLAs only and had to collect another six to make his position secure".¹²² One of the rebelling ministers, Gole, took back his resignation, but Khare was losing rather than gaining MLAs. Shareef resigned on May 21; he had no other option. A few days later Khare capitulated, or so it seemed. 68 out of Congress's 71 C.P. MLAs met under Patel's presidentship in the hill station of Pachmarhi, and it was agreed by all, including Vallabhbhai and Khare, that though Khare would remain Premier, his wings would be clipped. His portfolios would go to his colleagues and he would confine himself to coordinating their work. The resignations of Shukla, Mishra and Mehta were withdrawn.

The Pachmarhi compromise of May 25 was humiliating for Khare and he took no steps to implement it. Neither did he resign. What he did was to enlist the new Governor, Francis Wylie, in a strategy of survival. On July 7 Wylie informed Linlithgow that he was ready to dismiss Khare's colleagues if they did not resign themselves, and to ask the Premier to form a new Ministry. On July 13 Khare obtained resignation letters from two of his ministerial colleagues, R. M. Deshmukh and Gole, but a letter he wrote to Patel on July 15 was silent about the resignations and about his conversations with Wylie. Khare had said in this letter that he would "keep [Vallabhbhai] informed about the events as they occurred" and that "he would leave the final decision in the hands of the Sardar" but the promises were insincere.¹²³

Swiftmess was as necessary for Khare as secrecy. On July 23 the WorCom was to meet in Wardha, which was only 49 miles from the C.P. capital, Nagpur. Khare wanted to confront the WorCom with a new Ministry before it confronted him with new instructions. Wylie obliged him. He accepted the resignations of Khare, Gole and Deshmukh when they were offered to him on July 20. At 2 a.m. on July 21 Wylie asked Shukla, Mishra and Mehta to resign. They urged the Governor to wait until July 23 but the plea was rejected. Dismissing the three at 5 a.m. on July 21, Wylie installed a new Ministry led by Khare.

Privately Wylie's superiors disapproved of his action. "Wylie might perhaps have given the recalcitrant Ministers a little more time before dismissing them," wrote Brabourne, the acting Viceroy, to Zetland on August 5.¹²⁴ Zetland's reply showed that he understood, even if Wylie had not, the reality of the CPB's control over Congress's ministries:

"We may well have to adapt our practice in the face of such facts as the influence at present exercised over ministers by the Congress High Command."¹²⁵ Realizing his mistake, Wylie would later say: "Dr Khare was a fool but I was a greater fool."¹²⁶

The new Ministry lived for a couple of days. Summoned to Wardha by the WorCom, Khare admitted his error and agreed to resign. Bose asked him to convey the decision to the Governor over the telephone. It was about 10 p.m. and Khare said, "He must have gone to bed." At this Patel retorted: "Don't forget, Doctor, that your Governor goes late to bed. Didn't he see your colleagues at 1.50 a.m. to demand their resignations?" "This made Khare walk quietly... to the telephone."¹²⁷ Shukla replaced Khare. Soon, however, Khare mounted what was to be an unrelenting attack on Vallabhbhai, Gandhi and Congress as a whole. Expelled from Congress in October, he joined the Hindu Mahasabha; in 1943 he was taken into the Viceroy's Executive Council. A defender of his would claim that "Patel deliberately ruined Khare",¹²⁸ and Khare himself alleged that "devilish revenge, jealousy and malice" forced his exit from Congress.¹²⁹ His grudge did not diminish with the years and played a part, alongside the effort of the Nariman partisans, in building an image of a vindictive and ruthless Patel. "Woe betide the person whom Vallabhbhai has put down as politically inconvenient," said one writer, accepting the image.¹³⁰

Khare charged that Patel was "hostile" to him from end-1936, when the two had disagreed over Congress candidates for the C.P. Assembly, and that Vallabhbhai tried to prevent his election as leader in March 1937.¹³¹ No evidence was offered by Khare to support these allegations, which were contradicted by Patel's assertion that Khare "first asked me and then Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru to help him to be elected leader by presiding over the party convened to elect the leader".¹³² Khare could not have made such a request in March 1937 if Vallabhbhai had been hostile to him from end-1936; and the correspondence between Patel and Khare in 1937 and 1938 does not show malice in Vallabhbhai towards the Nagpur doctor. His own mistakes, not the Sardar's ill-will, deprived Khare of his majority; and Khare's reputation was ruined not by Patel's pitilessness but by the doctor's clandestine dealings with the Raj.

One man who "fully, lucidly and persuasively" defended Vallabhbhai's role in the Khare episode was Subhas Bose, the Congress President.¹³³ Said Subhas in a 1938 statement: "No injustice has been done to Dr Khare, nor has he been dealt with too harshly."¹³⁴ In his autobiography, Khare recalls a remark made to him by Wavell, who headed the Executive Council of which Khare was a member. "I can," the Viceroy exclaimed, "tolerate the Congressmen, but not you. You are an impossibility."¹³⁵ Though Rajendra Prasad once called Khare "an able man"¹³⁶ and Rajaji wrote to Khare in 1965 of "the

proud and honest spirit in you which keeps you still angry and unforgiving",¹³⁷ the Nagpur doctor suffered from a lack of balance, a weakness of which his autobiography provides pathetic proof.¹³⁸ Be that as it may, it has to be said to Patel's credit that he did not nurse a memory of Khare's arrows. "After national independence," says V. B. Kulkarni, "Khare met the Sardar on many occasions, especially in his capacity as Dewan of Alwar, when he was given aid on a generous scale by the Central Government."¹³⁹

Vallabhbhai's enemies found confirmation of his "dictatorial" nature in the ouster of Khare, which came a year after the Nariman episode. Aware of the reaction, Patel could do nothing about it.

Yes, I am called a fascist. I know it.... I checkmated Nariman and at my instance the Working Committee deposed a provincial Premier. But we had good grounds. Is it fascism to carry out disciplinary measures which are subject to the scrutiny of the Working Committee?

The other day I was in Karachi. [A pressman] asked me: "Do you regard yourself as Hitler?" I said to him: "It is immaterial what people call me. They may call me a Hitler or a super Hitler." Several days later I saw the result. I was supposed to have said: "I am not only a Hitler. I am a super Hitler."¹⁴⁰

Whether or not it added to Vallabhbhai's popularity, the Khare episode strengthened "the Sardar's reputation as the tough man of the Congress". P. U. Patel has put it correctly: "He was not interested in leading a flock of sheep and wanted everyone to think for himself. But if anyone tried to be too smart or attempted to flout the authority of the Congress High Command, he [had] to reckon with the Sardar."¹⁴¹ In the view of Ramkrishna Bajaj, who heard Subhas defending Vallabhbhai in Nagpur before a group of irate supporters of Khare, "Sardar's 'ruthlessness' was always an impersonal thing. It was in the national interest." Bajaj is right, as is Kulkarni when he describes Patel as "the great disciplinarian".¹⁴²

A less stern face of Vallabhbhai was seen at Maganwadi, the Bajaj guest-house in Wardha where he and other WorCom members often slept, conferred and, seated on the floor in rows, ate. If a meal was slow in coming, Patel would drum his thali with a spoon. If someone asked for a papad in the course of a meal, he would interject, "Remember this is a Marwari's house. There will be nothing after papad." "How is it, Jamnalalji," Vallabhbhai once asked over a meal, "that your Vidarbha leaders are named in annas? You have आणे (Aney) and बे आणे (Biyani)."¹⁴³ And in Dahyabhai's Bombay flat,

* आणे = anna; बे आणे = two annas.

Bipin, 11 in 1938, had seen a third side of grandfather. "We bantered and jostled and threw pillows at each other until I realized who he was and became deferential."¹⁴⁴

One man must have aroused Khare's and Nariman's envy. Virawala, Dewan of the princely State of Rajkot, defeated a bid by the Sardar and Gandhi to nudge the State towards democracy. Praja Mandals, or People's Associations, had sprung up in a number of states following Congress's Haripura session, and Patel had agreed to preside at some of their meetings. This was a departure from Congress's policy of avoiding a clash with the princes but neutrality in a raja-praja conflict was not, in the end, possible for Vallabhbhai.

Rajkot had a weak ruler, Thakore Dharmendrasinh, son of Lakhajiraj, the Thakore who had wished to "surpass" Patel as the Mahatma's lieutenant. Having squandered his State's savings, Dharmendrasinh had placed himself in the hands of Virawala, who sought to replenish the treasury by auctioning monopolies for the sale of rice, matches, sugar and cinema tickets and by insisting on a 14-hour day from workers in the State-owned textile mill. A monopoly for gambling was also sold and Virawala pondered mortgaging the Rajkot powerhouse. Led by a young man called U. N. Dhebar (Chief Minister, after independence, of Saurashtra), the Thakore's subjects campaigned against the creation of the monopolies and asked for a closure of gambling shops on religious holidays. Many including Dhebar were arrested and several were beaten; to register his support for the satyagrahis, Vallabhbhai went down to Rajkot in September 1938. Addressing a Rajkot State People's Conference, he said:

*We are not desirous of dethroning the ruler. We wish to limit his authority. That State cannot survive whose raja wastes an enormous amount of money on dances etc., while the peasants die of starvation.... If you are determined, no one can stop your progress, not even if all the rulers get together.*¹⁴⁵

Virawala invited Patel to tea and was sweet-tongued but he had already sought the Raj's assistance against "the machinations of a few malcontents".¹⁴⁶ Help came in the form of a new Dewan, Sir Patrick Cadell; Virawala "retired" and became the Thakore's Private Adviser. Cadell, however, was not quite the man Virawala had hoped for. Within three weeks of assuming office, he wrote Dharmendrasinh a blunt letter:

Yesterday I asked you to allow me to see you not later than 8 p.m. I had affairs of great importance to talk about. You sent your private secretary to tell me that you would see me at 8.30 p.m. I was present at the time and was told that you were in

your bath. I waited till 9 o'clock and was told that you might take another quarter or half an hour. I then left.

I now write to inform Your Highness that I have no intention of allowing myself to be treated in this grossly discourteous manner.... The condition of affairs in the state is very serious.... I do not wish to make any reference at present either to the amount of money you spend or the way you spend it. But it is certainly true that you take no part in the administration and show no interest in the welfare of your people.¹⁴⁷

Cadell released Dhebar, a step disliked by Virawala and Dharmendrasinh. In a letter to E. C. Gibson, the Raj's Resident for the Western India States, who had his headquarters in Rajkot, the Thakore lamented that "a very large meeting of some ten thousand people was held to welcome" Dhebar,¹⁴⁸ and asked for permission to end Cadell's services. The Raj's response was to demand Virawala's departure from Rajkot; it knew that the Private Adviser was guiding the Thakore's actions and drafting his letters.

Virawala left Rajkot and Cadell stayed on, but a praja-Cadell conflict ensued and Dhebar and his associates were rearrested. The Sardar sent Manibehn to Rajkot on November 11. Her toil towards sustaining the subjects' morale in village after village elicited Gandhi's praise. "Mani has been showing her mettle," he said in a letter to Mahadev. "I have never seen another daughter like her."¹⁴⁹ To some of his friends, but not directly to Manibehn, a justifiably proud Vallabhbhai spoke of her "amazing deeds".¹⁵⁰ She was arrested on December 5.

An isolated Virawala saw his opportunity and hit back with deadly intrigue. Flattering Patel, in a message shown to the Sardar, as "the only person with whom one could come to proper terms", Virawala sent an intermediary to him with a letter from the Thakore and an oral proposal for "a settlement without the knowledge of Cadell". This cunning appeal to the nationalist in Vallabhbhai worked for a while. Replying to the Thakore, Patel said, "No foreigner can be as much a well-wisher of yourself and of your people as we are."¹⁵¹ Invited by Dharmendrasinh, Patel went to Rajkot but did not heed Gandhi's advice to "also see the Resident and speak to him frankly".¹⁵² At 2 a.m. on December 26, after eight hours of talks with the Sardar, the Thakore signed a settlement the core of which was a promise to appoint a committee to prepare a scheme of reforms. It was agreed that seven places on the committee would be filled by men recommended by Vallabhbhai and three by officers serving the Thakore. The Thakore released his prisoners, including Manibehn, and Vallabhbhai, delighted that "the speed and drama of the settlement had baffled the Resident",¹⁵³ called off the stir. Virawala's

role in this "settlement" is suggested in a letter the Thakore wrote to Patel immediately after it was signed: "I think you are fully aware by now," the Thakore said, "that Virawala has been most loyal to me and my State."¹⁵⁴

Virawala's overtures to the Sardar were paralleled by a bid to convince Gibson and Cadell of Vallabhbhai's untrustworthiness. Gibson disparaged Patel in a talk with the Thakore, and a highly exaggerated account of Gibson's criticisms of Vallabhbhai was leaked to the Sardar, who was incensed at the Briton.¹⁵⁵ Having succeeded in widening the gulf between Patel and the Raj's officials, Virawala persuaded the Thakore to resile from his commitment to Vallabhbhai. The wily adviser's victory was complete when Dharmendrasinh obtained, in January 1939, the Raj's sanction for Cadell's removal and reappointed Virawala as Dewan. "Some people think," Patel was to say later, "that Virawala had run rings round me and used me as an instrument for removing Sir Patrick."¹⁵⁶ Vallabhbhai did not publicly concede the truth of this charge but he did not deny it either; according to Ghanshyamdas Birla, with whom Patel was frank, "the Sardar eventually discovered" that it was a "cardinal error" to trust Virawala and regard Gibson and Cadell "as the arch-villains of the piece".¹⁵⁷ In Birla's view, "Vallabhbhai did not find himself a good match for Virawala".¹⁵⁸ Later Patel would recall that "Gandhiji used to tell me that Kathiawadis are as sweet as honey in their speech but there are as many turns in their words as in their turbans".¹⁵⁹

The settlement was revoked by the Thakore three weeks after he had signed it, and a chastened and outraged Vallabhbhai called the Thakore "a ruler in name only", referred to "the glaring blemishes" of Virawala and said that "this flagrant breach of a solemn settlement leaves but one course open to the people of Rajkot" – struggle.¹⁶⁰ The Rajkot regime, which now consisted, in effect, of three men, Virawala, his nephew Kumar Valerawala and Fateh Mohammad Khan, a police officer, answered Patel's call with unconcealed repression. Meetings were banned. Newspapers were kept out. Defiers of the bans were seized, beaten and deprived of their property.

Remembering that her father-in-law, Karamchand Gandhi, had once been Dewan of Rajkot and that her husband was the recipient of honours and respect from Dharmendrasinh's father, Kasturba announced that she would join the struggle. The Mahatma sent his wife to Vallabhbhai, who refused at first to let her go to Rajkot. When Kasturba insisted, Patel agreed but added that Manibehn would accompany her. Mridula Sarabhai also went. The three women were arrested in early February, detained in a shabby place and given a written message from the Thakore to the effect that the Mahatma was ill; but a phone call from Rajkot to Wardha elicited the information that

Gandhi was well. Having heard reports of beatings inside and outside Rajkot's prisons, Gandhi reached Rajkot himself at the end of February. Fateh Mohammad Khan met him at the station with a letter of "welcome" from the Thakore. Virawala called on the Mahatma, prostrated before him and talked for three and a half hours, but he was in no mood to accede to popular wishes and did not allow the Thakore to meet Gandhi on his own. Noting Dharmendrasinh's "mental helplessness", the Mahatma described Virawala, in a letter to Gibson, as "the virtual ruler of Rajkot".¹⁶¹

Gandhi's response to what he found in Rajkot was a fast that began on March 3 and an appeal to Linlithgow to "induce fulfilment of the promise made by the Thakore Saheb".¹⁶² The Thakore, or Virawala, to be more accurate, released Kasturba, Manibehn and Mridula on March 6 but what the Viceroy did was more significant. He asked Sir Maurice Gwyer, the Chief Justice, to determine whether or not a breach of promise had occurred; and Gandhi broke his fast. Vallabhbhai narrated his case to Gwyer; Virawala presented Dharmendrasinh's version and argued that the December 26 settlement was the result of "deceit, pressure and fraud".¹⁶³ Delivered on April 3, Gwyer's judgment completely vindicated Patel. Four days later, the Viceroy declared that everything would be done to ensure that the Thakore honoured his word.

Round two thus went to Vallabhbhai and Gandhi, even as round one had gone to Virawala, but the third and final round was snatched by Virawala. He fuelled minority fears in Rajkot, and Muslims, Bhayats (kinsmen of the ruler) and Garasias (landowners) declared that a committee dominated by Patel's candidates would crush their interests. On April 16, Muslims and sword-swinging Bhayats surrounded a prayer meeting that Gandhi was conducting in Rajkot. They were looking for Vallabhbhai but he had gone, unexpectedly, to Amreli, 78 miles southeast of Rajkot. When the prayers ended, the Mahatma went towards the intimidators. A few tried to accompany him but Gandhi instructed them to stay where they were. Some of the demonstrators rushed at him with drawn swords but Gandhi did not alter his course. Then a young Bhayat stepped forward and offered the Mahatma his hand. Gandhi took it and calmly walked through the Bhayat lines to his residence.¹⁶⁴

There was an evil curiosity about the route Patel would take to return to Rajkot from Amreli; and a neighbouring raja was suspected of a wish to have the Sardar murdered.¹⁶⁵ Gandhi's first reaction to the declaration of Rajkot's minorities was to draft concessions that could be made to them; he also pondered another fast if the concessions failed to satisfy them. Vallabhbhai fiercely opposed Gandhi's proposals. "I know that you have to suffer the consequences of my many stupid acts," the Mahatma said to him. "No," Patel

replied, "there has been no stupid act up to now, but the letters you now propose to send are stupid!" Gandhi laughed and tore up his proposals. "That step," he observed later, referring to his idea of another fast, "would have been suicidal."¹⁶⁶

The step Gandhi did take was wholly unexpected. In May 1939 he renounced the award that he had obtained from Gwyer and the promise he had obtained from the Viceroy. "The award," said Gandhi, "instead of making my way smooth, became a potent cause of angering the Muslims and Bhayats against me."¹⁶⁷ Democracy would have led to a clash between communities.

Vallabhbhai accepted the Mahatma's decision "without uttering a single word",¹⁶⁸ and Virawala triumphed. The Dewan had only one aim, preserving his power, and only one set of foes, the Gandhi-ites. The Mahatma and Patel, on the other hand, were simultaneously fighting feudalism, imperialism and communalism. Gains on one front were often cancelled by losses elsewhere, and to defeat one enemy another's help seemed necessary. Until Gandhi renounced the Raj's award in his favour, he had been obliged to seek the empire's help against an Indian prince; and he and Vallabhbhai had found that a bid for democratic rights tended to alienate Muslims. The Rajkot experience evoked from Lord Lothian, a pro-Indian Briton, a comment that was true, depressing and prophetic: "The people as yet have had no experience of representative institutions, and if Congress pushes them too far, it may push the Mohammedans out of India altogether."¹⁶⁹ Vallabhbhai may have sensed this truth when he accepted without demur Gandhi's decision to hand over victory to Virawala.

The Raj enjoyed Patel's and Gandhi's discomfiture. So did the rajas, one of whom, the Jamsaheb of Nawanagar, had aided and advised Virawala in his battle against the Sardar and Gandhi. According to one of the Rajkot satyagrahis, Vallabhbhai was "defeated, humbled and humiliated by Virawala, the Jamsaheb and Gibson".¹⁷⁰ Yet when a Praja Mandal worker in Rajkot likened Virawala to a witch or a demoness, Patel at once stopped the worker's mouth and said, "If I had not met Bapu, I might have ended up like Virawala."¹⁷¹

The hues of Rajkot appeared in other princely states. In Bhavnagar, a crowd of about 30 Muslims, armed with lathis, axes and knives, tried, in May 1939, to attack Vallabhbhai who was being taken out in a procession of the local Praja Mandal. Patel was saved because others engaged the assailants and received their blows. One Mandal worker was killed and its leader, Nanabhai Bhatt, had his head smashed.¹⁷² In Baroda, which had a Marathi-speaking ruler and a Marathi-speaking minority, Vallabhbhai's foes played the linguistic card and said that under democracy Gujaratis would trample upon Maharashtrian

rights. Vandals destroyed, in February 1939, the pandal under which Patel was to address a meeting in Baroda, burnt the dais and stoned his car. "I have always had to face enmity," Vallabhbhai sighed.¹⁷³ In the small Kathiawad state of Limbdi, which had a population of 41,000, the caste card was used: because several Vantias were active in the Limbdi Praja Mandal, the association was dubbed the Bania Mandal. On the other hand, in Mysore, one of the country's largest princely states, Patel was able to effect, with the help of Kripalani, a settlement between the People's Congress and the ruler; and in Aundh, in Maharashtra, the ruler took the initiative in setting up a people's administration. All in all, however, the bid in the late thirties for democracy in the princely states was unsuccessful. Yet it fetched Vallabhbhai experiences that would be of value after independence.

* * *

Subhas said at the end of 1938 that he desired another year in Congress's chair. Patel, who had not liked Subhas's selection a year earlier, was disturbed. The reaction had a personal component. Vallabhbhai's misgivings about Subhas's role in Vithalbhai's will had not died, and he held a poor opinion of Subhas's efficiency. In July 1938 he had written to Prasad, who had fallen ill: "Jawahar has gone abroad for at least 4 months. You go out for 6 months, and we have to deal with a President who does not know his own job."¹⁷⁴ Yet Patel would have opposed Subhas's re-appointment even if the will episode had never occurred and even if his estimate of Subhas's capability had been different.

His disagreements with Subhas were profound. Subhas was eager, and Vallabhbhai reluctant, to exploit England's vulnerability before Hitler's threats. Whereas Subhas felt that the moment had come for mass disobedience to oust the British, Patel thought that Congress's principal task in 1939 was to consolidate its power in the provinces. Not that Subhas was indifferent to the advantages of power. When a League-headed coalition fell in Assam, where Congress had a strength of 33 in a house of 108, Subhas had favoured a bid by Congress to form a Ministry. Prasad, the CPB member in charge of Assam, and Azad were against the idea but Vallabhbhai backed Subhas; a Congress Ministry led by Gopinath Bardoloi took office in Assam in 1938, survived and grew in strength. Yet Subhas seemed ready, at the end of 1938, to pull out all the Congress Ministries and war with the Raj, a course that appeared unwarranted and unwise to Patel. Another difference was over Gandhi, who was dispensable in Subhas's eyes but absolutely necessary to the Sardar. Finally, though Subhas had led Congress in 1938 in the manner of a constitutional monarch, he now desired a Prime Minister's power for the Congress

President. Vallabhbhai's views on this question, spelt out without ambiguity at the end of 1936, were the opposite of Subhas's and had not altered.

Subhas's candidacy became even less appealing to Patel after he received a report from Azad of the line being taken by Bose's supporters.

They came to me and said that they were very very sorry on learning that I have absolutely refused to accept the presidentship for the next year and owing to my refusal it was feared that Sardar Patel would become the President....

But as you were considered to be anti-socialist and anti-extremist, and that you do not hold strong views against the federation, moreover you were considered to be against Hindu-Muslim unity, it was necessary to propose the name of Subhas Babu to save the Congress of all these dangers.¹⁷⁵

Azad's report offended Vallabhbhai. Though some PCCs had proposed his name, he had no intention of offering himself for the Presidentship and did not harbour all the opinions ascribed to him. To Prasad, whom he sent a copy of Azad's letter, he said: "I never dreamt that he (Subhas) will stoop to such dirty mean tactics for re-election."¹⁷⁶ Gandhi, too, disfavoured Subhas's re-election. His attitude was possibly influenced by a report that Subhas had been "in contact with the German Consul at Calcutta and was negotiating some arrangement".¹⁷⁷ The Raj's Director of Central Intelligence had given the report to Munshi, Bombay's Law Minister, who forwarded it to the Mahatma. Gandhi must have felt that in the event of an international war, Bose, whose "admiration for Mussolini was then known to many", would urge an unsupportable line.^{177a}

In any case, Gandhi advised Subhas not to seek a second term and Jawaharlal counselled Bose similarly, but Subhas was keen. Gandhi, who "instinctively felt that Maulana's Presidentship might ease the communal situation",¹⁷⁸ had thought of Azad. Patel backed the idea. At first Azad said no but in the middle of January, after talks in Bardoli with Gandhi and the Sardar, he changed his mind. "We succeeded," Vallabhbhai wrote to Prasad, "in persuading Maulana Saheb to accept the responsibility.... He has agreed to do so after considerable hesitation."¹⁷⁹ Following Azad's assent, Patel formally withdrew his name,¹⁸⁰ but the Maulana, who had proceeded from Bardoli to Bombay, changed his mind again. "He rushed back to Gandhiji to ask him to relieve him."¹⁸¹ A resident of Calcutta, Azad felt that "a contest with another Bengali" would be "inelegant and even distasteful".¹⁸²

Pattabhi Sitaramayya, whose candidacy was announced a week before the election, possessed little of Subhas's fame or charisma. The

Andhra PCC had entered his name; Vallabhbhai and Azad both having withdrawn, only Pattabhi was available as an alternative to Subhas. At Gandhi's urging, Patel, Prasad and five other WorCom members issued a statement calling for Pattabhi's election.

Bose might have withdrawn if Vallabhbhai had been Gandhi's candidate¹⁸³ but with only Pattabhi left in the field he saw a chance to inflict a defeat on Congress's establishment. His first salvo was an attack on the pro-Pattabhi statement. "Sardar Patel and other leaders" – Vallabhbhai was the only one named – were guilty, Bose said, of "moral coercion". It was unfair, Subhas added, for WorCom members "to take sides in an organized manner". He went on to cast a damaging and unfair aspersion: "It is widely believed that there may be a compromise on the Federal Scheme between the Right Wing of the Congress and the British Government during the coming year."¹⁸⁴

The charge was damaging because Indian opinion was now increasingly anti-British, a mood created by the likelihood of war between England and Germany and by Britain's attachment to power at the all-India level. It was false because Patel, Prasad and Rajaji were stoutly opposed to the Federal Scheme, which gave rulers of princely States control over one-third of the proposed Federal Assembly's seats. Vallabhbhai, by now fully involved in a struggle to "limit the authority" of the Thakore of Rajkot and his brother princes, could not have felt any sympathy for a Federal Assembly weighted in favour of Maharajas and Nawabs. Jawaharlal, who thus far had stayed out of the Presidential controversy, said publicly that the pro-Federation smear was unjust. Calling Subhas's statement "amazing", Patel said that he knew "of no member who wants the Federation" and claimed that he and his WorCom colleagues had "a perfect right to guide the delegates".¹⁸⁵

But the delegates refused to be guided by Vallabhbhai or by their awareness of the Mahatma's views. On January 29, Subhas was re-elected by 1,580 to 1,375. His personality, a nationwide wish for a more militant line against Britain and the play of some regional factors enabled the incumbent "rebel" to defeat Gandhi and Patel. Congress now had three alternatives: to let the elected President steer its affairs and reject the Mahatma's leadership; to let Gandhi continue guiding it and oblige Subhas to function as a constitutional monarch; or to explore a compromise. Rejecting Gandhi was not a practical proposition. As Subhas himself put it, "A large majority of Congressmen who dislike the High Command did not want to give up Mahatma Gandhi."¹⁸⁶

* For instance, many Tamil votes went to Bose – despite Rajaji's opposition – because Pattabhi favoured the inclusion of Madras city in a future Andhra province.

Subhas ruled out the second alternative and strove for a compromise. Yet Vallabhbhai and the Mahatma were as opposed to a compromise as Subhas was to being a figurehead. "It is impossible for us to work with [Bose]," Patel wrote to Prasad, "and he also really desires that he should have a free hand."¹⁸⁷ At the instance of Gandhi and the Sardar, twelve of the WorCom's fifteen members resigned. Subhas was running a high fever when Congress met in March in the village of Tripuri on the banks of the Narmada. Gandhi did not come to Tripuri; he was in Rajkot, fasting. A chariot drawn by 52 elephants (it was Congress's 52nd annual session) was to have carried Subhas in a procession; it carried his portrait instead. His presidential address, read for him by his older brother Sarat, held out a threat of mass disobedience against the Raj.

Vallabhbhai's principal aim at Tripuri was to confine Subhas to the bounds of a constitutional monarch, and he was ready for the break that he knew would follow. The objective was reached by the passage of a resolution calling upon the President "to appoint the Working Committee in accordance with the wishes of Mahatma Gandhi". Patel neither drafted the resolution nor spoke in its favour. In fact he carefully avoided the Tripuri stage. His interest was in the goal, not in his role, and he knew that it would suit the Bose brothers' strategy if Tripuri was asked to choose between a triumphant young rebel and a 63-year-old said to be lukewarm about Hindu-Muslim unity, social justice and a push for freedom. Drafted, in the main, by C.R., the resolution was moved by Pant. Rajaji spoke for Vallabhbhai too when, seconding the resolution, he mercilessly ruled out a compromise:

There are two boats on the river. One is an old boat but a big boat, piloted by Mahatma Gandhi. Another man has a new boat, attractively painted and beflagged. Mahatma Gandhi is a tried boatman who can safely transport you. If you get into the other boat, which I know is leaky, all will go down, and the river Narmada is indeed deep.

*The new boatman says, "If you don't get into my boat, at least tie my boat to yours." This is also impossible. We cannot tie a leaky boat to a good boat, exposing ourselves to the peril of going down.*¹⁸⁸

Sarat told Patel that Subhas's supporters would back the resolution if "certain changes were made in it", but the Sardar did not respond, and Sarat complained to Gandhi that Vallabhbhai's attitude was that "not a word, not a comma should be changed".¹⁸⁹ Immediately after Subhas's victory, Gandhi had said that Pattabhi's defeat was also his. Following the Tripuri session, Sarat Bose wrote to the Mahatma disagreeing with this interpretation. Sarat added, however, that there

was "some justification for describing it as a defeat... of the ruling coterie of which Sardar Patel is the shining light".¹⁹⁰

Alleging "mean, malicious and vindictive" propaganda against Bose at Tripuri, Sarat insinuated that Vallabhbhai had taken a hand in it.¹⁹¹ The bitterness of the Bose partisans seemed reserved for Patel, even though Gandhi's line towards Subhas was at least as hard. Of the latter fact the Bose brothers were well aware, for the Mahatma had been frank in what he said and wrote to Subhas before and after Tripuri. It was inexpedient, however, to attack the Mahatma. To shoot arrows at Vallabhbhai was safe and, in some quarters, rewarding.

Too astute to offer himself as a target, Patel chose not to go to Calcutta when Subhas convened the AICC there in April.¹⁹² Gandhi and Subhas had several meetings but did not agree. Implementing the Tripuri directive was too much for Subhas, who resigned the Presidentship he had so dramatically won. Prasad was elected in his place. Noting that Subhas's followers had launched a campaign accusing Congress Ministers of misusing their positions, the AICC resolved that such propaganda should cease. Subhas countered by asking the public to observe July 9 as a day of protest against the resolution. Prasad sought an explanation from Subhas; when Bose defended his action, the WorCom decided, "with great regret", that Subhas had committed "a breach of discipline" and barred him from elective office in Congress for three years.¹⁹³ "We may be guilty of cowardice," Vallabhbhai had written to Prasad, "if we do not do anything simply because some people are too important to be pulled down."¹⁹⁴ Subhas's "revolt" was thus put down but his honour was undiminished and audacious deeds lay in his future.

The Sardar was abused by Subhas's admirers not because he was "mean, malicious or vindictive" towards Bose – no evidence to support the insinuation was offered – but because his conviction that Congress should not give up Gandhi for Subhas was as deep as Subhas's conviction that he was the man of the hour, and because Patel's strength, pitted against Subhas's, was formidable. Vallabhbhai's self-control too was admirable but not limitless. Hearing, on one occasion, that Subhas had called him "undemocratic", Patel retorted, "The lion becomes a king by birth, not by an election in the jungle."¹⁹⁵ The ungracious remark was also, in the light of Subhas's subsequent courage, inapt, but entirely understandable in the context of Congress's internal struggle of 1939.

The remark was, moreover, a rare departure from Vallabhbhai's strategy of silence and, when necessary, absence. Men like Mahadev Desai found the silence trying. Friendship between Desai and Patel, deepened in prison in the early thirties, had continued to grow. It showed in their letters to each other and in simple gestures: when, towards the end of 1938, Mahadev fell ill and needed to go to the hills

of Simla to recuperate, Vallabhbhai sent his coat to Desai. Seething at the attacks on the Sardar and yearning for a riposte, Mahadev pressed Patel in July 1939 to announce himself as a candidate for the 1940 presidency of Congress. "If you lose," added Mahadev, "all of us should get out and hand over Congress to the wild guys."¹⁹⁶

Desai urged the Mahatma too to put forward Vallabhbhai's name. "You can't forever be treading carefully," he told Gandhi.¹⁹⁷ But, as the Sardar well knew, the man about whose feelings Gandhi was concerned at this stage was neither Vallabhbhai nor Subhas. It was Jawaharlal. On July 3 Patel wrote to Nehru: "Bapu feels hurt when your feelings are wounded. I don't think he loves anybody more than he loves you."¹⁹⁸

* * *

The summer of 1939 in Gujarat was hotter and drier than usual. While Vallabhbhai was organizing drought relief, an Austrian in Europe planned war. On the night of August 22, 1939, a Russo-German pact was signed in Stalin's presence. On September 1 Hitler's armies entered Poland. Two days later, within hours of England's declaration of war against Germany, the Viceroy announced that India had joined the war. Patel detested Nazism – "it involves the complete suppression of democracy", he would soon say¹⁹⁹ – but he was outraged at Linlithgow's announcement. Fully a year earlier, when war had seemed possible in Europe, he had told Lumley, the Bombay Governor, that Congress "would expect to be consulted by the authorities and to be invited to approve participation in the war".²⁰⁰ Lumley had passed on the message to Zetland, who informed the whole British cabinet. The desire to be consulted was reiterated several times since, and in May 1939 the AICC had declared that Congress would oppose "all attempts to impose a war without the consent of the Indian people".²⁰¹ Yet, while HMG had asked Canada and Australia if they wished to join the war, India was made a belligerent by a stroke of the Viceregal pen.

The anger he felt was suppressed by Vallabhbhai, who wanted to avoid a break with the Raj. The Mahatma thought like him, and so did Rajaji, but Jawaharlal, to quote Prasad, was "in a combative mood".²⁰² For all his loathing of Fascism and Nazism, Jawaharlal was a good deal more anti-British at this point than Patel or the Mahatma; Nehru's attitude was related to the fact that Russia was not yet on England's side in the war. Gandhi met the Viceroy and told him that he viewed the war "with an English heart"; tears came to his eyes when he spoke to Linlithgow of the possibility of bombs on Westminster Abbey. He could not commit Congress, the Mahatma

added, but personally he was for Congress giving unconditional though non-violent support to Britain.

Vallabhbhai's position had been revealed in August, when war seemed imminent. Congress Premiers convened by him and meeting under his chairmanship had agreed that "cooperation with the British should be wholehearted if an understanding was arrived at between the Congress and the Government."²⁰³ Jawaharlal, on the other hand, had said in the same month that "in the event of a war breaking out the Congress Ministries may have to resign".²⁰⁴ Informed, after the war had started, of a report by an Indian member of the ICS, Akbar Hydari, that his British colleagues were happy at the likelihood of the Congress Ministries resigning, Jawaharlal exploded: "It is none of Hydari's business what we should decide in the Working Committee. I am going to pull out all the Ministries."²⁰⁵ An even more militant line was advocated by Subhas, who wanted to ensure that no "Indian men, money and resources" went into the "imperialist war".²⁰⁶

On the evening of September 2, following a phone call from Mahadev in Wardha, Vallabhbhai and Manibehn boarded the Punjab Mail for Delhi. At Itarsi they linked up with the Mahatma, who was on his way from Wardha to Simla. From Jhansi station they wired Subhas and Jayaprakash asking them to assist the WorCom in determining its response to the war. A similar message went to Jinnah: Gandhi was bidding for an Indian consensus. Patel stayed in Delhi while the Mahatma visited Simla to meet the Viceroy but rejoined him on the journey back to Wardha. "At almost every station on the way," Manibehn recorded in her diary,

*one or two men put up by the Forward Bloc (Subhas's body) would ask, 'Why has Mahatmaji supported England? Why is he sentimental about London?' But when asked if they preferred that Hitler should be supported, and tears shed over Berlin, they would reply, 'No, no, that couldn't be right.'*²⁰⁷

The WorCom met in Wardha from September 9 to 15. Subhas and Jayaprakash joined the deliberations but Jinnah stayed out. Sitting behind her father as an attendant, a practice that would continue, Manibehn noted that at one of the meetings Vallabhbhai "properly told off Subhas".²⁰⁸ Another diary entry refers to "a lot of heated talk".²⁰⁹ In the end the WorCom sided with Jawaharlal, its mood affected by the Raj's refusal to consult it before drafting India into the war and even more by a change made by the British Parliament in the Government of India Act. The amendment empowered the Viceroy to override or take over provincial governments. It could reduce Congress Ministers to the status of the Viceroy's officials. The Mahatma tried out his idea of Congress offering unconditional non-violent support to the British

but it was shot down. Through a resolution drafted by Jawaharlal, the WorCom asked Britain to declare her war aims and state how they would apply to India.

Discussing this event eleven years later with Narhari Parikh, who was working on his life of the Sardar, Vallabhbhai would say with some truth: "If we had followed Bapu's way fully the situation would have been totally different. Bapu was ready to offer moral support. But he (Jawaharlal) stood in the way. If he had agreed [with Gandhi's view], there would have been no Pakistan." "The Viceroy had told me," Vallabhbhai would add, referring to a Linlithgow-Patel meeting in October 1939, "that if Congress does not support me I'll have to take the Muslims' help."²¹⁰

However, in September 1939 Patel did not oppose Jawaharlal. "I was sorry to find myself alone," Gandhi said.²¹¹ The Sardar's stance was affected by popular opinion which shared Jawaharlal's view that "friendship between India and England is possible but only on equal terms" and that an unfree India could not be expected to fight for the freedom of Poland.²¹²

Reluctant as he was to let go of power, Patel accepted the reality of the Indo-British gulf. Losing ministerial office in the provinces was far better than losing prestige among the masses. Of course, if Britain cooperated, Congress could retain both. Indians would feel a glow and gladly join England's war against Nazism if HMG announced that India would be free at the end of the war and if, meanwhile, representative Indians were associated with power at the centre as well. These were the two things that Gandhi and the WorCom asked of Britain. Awaiting a reply, the WorCom also authorized a three-man committee, comprising Jawahar, who was named chairman, Vallabhbhai and Azad, to respond from day to day to the Raj's war policies.

Some Britons joined Congress in asking HMG to be farsighted. The *Manchester Guardian* spoke of a "historic opportunity to secure Indian support" and Attlee, the Labour leader, pleaded for "imaginative insight".²¹³ A group of British officials in the Punjab privately urged Linlithgow to proclaim "in a few stirring words his belief that a war for freedom could only end in the freedom of India".²¹⁴ Yet the Raj was unwilling to listen. It chose to interpret Congress's demand as blackmail during England's life-and-death struggle. Zetland, the Secretary of State, said as much in the House of Lords,²¹⁵ and Linlithgow wrote to the King that he was being "subjected to heavy and sustained pressure designed to force from us major political concessions as the price of Congress's cooperation in the war effort".²¹⁶ The proposal of the Punjab officials was "ridiculed".²¹⁷

Not stopping at rejecting Congress's pleas, the Raj decided to strengthen Congress's adversaries. As Linlithgow would candidly inform the King, "as soon as [he] realised" the pressure to which he was being subjected, he "summoned representatives of all the more important interests and communities in India, including the Chancellor of the Chamber of Princes and Mr Jinnah,... and interviewed them one by one,... a heavy and trying task, but well worth the trouble."²¹⁸ He had opted for divide-and-rule. "I had one or two rather anxious moments," Linlithgow admitted in a letter to Zetland, "when Jinnah, Jawaharlal and Gandhi were discussing the situation together,"²¹⁹ but fortunately for the Raj, Jinnah, who said that the Viceroy's invitation to him had "shocked Gandhi and Congress",²²⁰ had no intention of helping Congress, and the Viceroy was able to speak of "the conflicting interests and claims" of the Indians meeting him.²²¹

Congress's pleas were neither sudden nor unexpected nor conceived after the declaration of war. Every Congress session and every session of a Congress-majority legislature had asked for constitutional advance at the centre, and Zetland had conceded, while referring to England's "life and death struggle" that Congress was only "reasserting" its claims.²²² Still the Raj rejected Congress's pleas and place. It did so partly because Britons had been hurt by the language of Congress extremists over the years; partly because some of them genuinely thought that minorities would be unsafe under Congress rule; but also because a section of the Raj's guardians was unreconciled to the idea of Indian freedom. The feeling of this section was reflected in a phrase that Erskine, the Governor of Madras, used at the end of 1939 while writing to the Viceroy: "If, by bad management of our affairs, we were ever forced to leave India...."²²³

Patel had been willing, in September, to give the Raj a little time. Following a message he received via Munshi from Lumley, he delayed by a week a directive to Congress's legislature parties to reiterate the WorCom's demands. Jawaharlal had pressed for the recital, which was bound to needle the Raj.²²⁴ Yet the week yielded nothing, and early in October Vallabhbhai found in an interview with Linlithgow that the Raj had indeed shut the door to Congress. Though the interview enabled Linlithgow to note Patel's "sense of humour", "shrewd and active brain" and "strong personality",²²⁵ he showed no inclination to move towards Congress and, as noted earlier, told Vallabhbhai frankly that the Raj would turn to the Muslims if Congress did not cooperate with it.

On October 17 a Viceregal statement conveyed Britain's formal reply to Congress. Indians would have constitutional talks, not freedom, at the end of the war; during the pendency of the war they

would be granted a decorative consultative committee. To the WorCom's query about Britain's war aims and their application to India, the following "answer" was offered: "HMG have not themselves yet defined with any ultimate precision their detailed objectives in the prosecution of the war."²²⁶

Congress asked its Ministries to resign. Rajaji's left office on October 27. By November 27 all of them were out. Patel had remembered to ask the Speakers in the Congress-majority legislatures to adjourn their houses sine die. This was to deny Congress's foes an immediate opportunity to form ministries.²²⁷ A party boss sending typed instructions to Speakers is certainly an impropriety, even in the context of Congress's war against the Raj, and proves Vallabhbhai's attachment to Congress's power. Yet it also proves his candour. A weaker man would have left no evidence.

SIX
1939-45
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CONGRESS had done well in office. Water was taken to dry villages. The debts of impoverished peasants were cancelled. Temples were opened to untouchables. Land reforms were on the anvil when the Ministries vacated office. Bans on liquor, though controversial and hard to enforce, improved life in thousands of poor homes. "Domestic brawls have ceased, a sufficiency of food is available and the grip of the money-lender has relaxed," the British Collector of Salem district in Madras presidency noted.¹ The integrity, at the time, of most Congress Ministers and their pro-poor measures increased Congress's prestige. Vallabhbhai's vigilance and supervision had helped.

When the Ministries resigned, Jinnah, who had resented Congress's power as much as Vallabhbhai had treasured it, told the country's Muslims that they had experienced deliverance. We saw that though Congress neither desired nor created Hindu rule Muslims viewed it as a Hindu body. Patel tried to show that the perception was flawed. When a League committee headed by the Muslim ruler of Pirpur charged in January 1939 that Congress's Ministries were depriving Muslims of government jobs and trying to Hinduize Muslims, Vallabhbhai marshalled a rebuttal.²

It was not easy to pick holes in Congress's refutation, and the League and Linlithgow rejected Congress's proposal for an inquiry into the allegations by Sir Maurice Gwyer, Chief Justice of the Federal Court. The Viceroy admitted privately that "the Governors of the provinces concerned had brought no complaints of unjust treatment of the Muslims to his notice";³ and Sir Francis Wylie, Governor of the C. P. from 1938 to 1940, felt that "the accusations of gross anti-Muslim bias on the part of the Congress ministries were... moonshine".⁴ These were significant reactions, for Governors were the guardians of minority interests under the 1935 Act and entitled, in that role, to act independently of Ministers. Yet the image was stronger than the reality. Responding to Jinnah, large numbers of Muslims observed Deliverance Day on December 22.

Though aware of the reality, the Raj gave its imprimatur to the League's version. Zetland spoke of Congress as "a Hindu organization which should reach a settlement with the Muslim League",⁵ and Patel's suppressed indignation burst out:

We asked the Viceroy for the objectives of the war. We did not receive any direct reply but now are being... told to go and settle with the Muslims, that is, with the Muslim League. If we do succeed in coming to an agreement with them we shall probably be told, "Go and settle with the Indian princes."

*When that happens no doubt they will say, "What about the Europeans who have so many interests in the country and who have invested so much money?" Thus they wish to prolong the differences in this country, exactly as the monkey did in the story of the two cats who referred their dispute to it... You (the British) are the real cause of all our quarrels. You introduced communal electorates...*⁶

* * *

The Bombay flat of the widower Dahyabhai was, as noted earlier, Vallabhbhai's home, and Manibehn's. After seven years on Sandhurst Road, Dahyabhai and his son Bipin had moved, in 1937, to a flat in the Opera House area; and in 1939 they moved again, this time to "Hem Prabha" on Marine Drive. Vallabhbhai and Manibehn moved with them. Walchand Hirachand, the industrialist, would frequently turn up to accompany the Sardar on his pre-dawn or evening constitutionals on Worli Seaface or Marine Drive. So would Rameshwardas Birla and, when in Bombay, his brother Ghanshyamdas. Sometimes journalists wanting to know Patel's mind were permitted to walk alongside.

Always Manibehn was with her father – to be accurate, one step behind him. Vallabhbhai was a brisk walker but so was the petite daughter. If the Sardar paced on the balcony or in the living room – because it was wet outside or simply because he wanted to think –, Manibehn was again close at hand, his helper and his guard. She washed his clothes, made his appointments, took messages for him and sat beside him at virtually every interview. When he went out of Bombay she went with him. She bruised people while safeguarding her father's time and energy, for her commitment was total and her manner brusque, but she did not know of the hurts she caused and had not the slightest intention of causing them: her sole concern was to mould, insofar as it lay in her power, father's world to his convenience – to insulate him not from struggles and imprisonments but from din, dust and unwanted callers.

Her father did not always back her up. Narhari Parikh's daughter Vanmala, 12 at the time, recalls an incident that took place during a visit that Vallabhbhai and Manibehn made to Bardoli in the mid thirties:

I told Sardar that Manibehn was angry with me and other children for tracking mud into his cottage. Thereupon he took me and some other children to a shallow stream outside where we frolicked barefoot on cool wet mud. Then we returned to the cottage where all of us including Sardar romped on the stone floor with our dirty feet. Manibehn's face was a study.⁷

Another vignette of the Patel of this period is supplied by Hitendra Desai, Chief Minister of Gujarat, 1965-71, whose father Kanjibhai was Vallabhbhai's host whenever the Sardar visited Surat:

Two rich Suratis came to our home in 1937 to meet the Sardar because he had become powerful – Congress's Ministries were under him. One of them said to Sardar: "Do us the honour of staying with us for a night or two once in a while."

"I make a home only once in a lifetime," Sardar shot back, alluding to his single state and simultaneously rejecting the idea of a second host in Surat.⁸

His Bardoli cottage and the garden around it remained a pull. Vallabhbhai halted there as often as he could, especially in the cooler part of the year. He would encourage the banana, mango, chicku, lichi and grapefruit trees, the rose, bougainvillea, champa and raat-ki-rani bushes and the vegetable plants; and he marked out a path from where the trees and plants could be tended. During at least three Januarys, in 1936, 1939 and 1942, Gandhi was the Sardar's guest in Bardoli. The Mahatma invariably came with a party. "Gandhiji is about to camp here," Patel would inform Walchand. The Seth always sent the needful.⁹

Once Walchand came himself, while the Mahatma and his friends were visiting. Vallabhbhai instructed the manager, Uttamchand Shah, to serve the Seth an adequate jalebis-and-all lunch. Shah did as he was bidden; since Ashram rules forbade preferential treatment, everyone got the special meal. Word of the "extravagance" reached Gandhi, who summoned Shah. "You ran a restaurant today," the Mahatma told the manager. "Bapuji," Shah replied, "you are a guest here and Sardar is the host. Should I obey the guest or the host?" Gandhi laughed and ended the inquisition.¹⁰

Early one morning in Bardoli, Vallabhbhai bumped, while taking his constitutional, into Makanji Parsottam Patel of Bajipura village,

a veteran of the Nagpur and Bardoli satyagrahas. Next to Makanji was an ass laden with things.

"Why this horse?" the Sardar asked Makanji. "A new cremation ground is being opened today," Makanji replied. "I am going there to prepare the place." "So you are ready for the opening ceremony?" Vallabhbhai asked. "Yes, Sardar Saheb," Makanji replied, adding that so-and-so was to inaugurate.

"That's not what I mean," Vallabhbhai rejoined. "Have you got your first body?"¹¹

* * *

The "tremendous fact", in Gandhi's words, of the Muslim League looking upon the Congress as the Muslims' enemy¹² lay behind the Mahatma's decision, at the end of 1939, to press the presidency on Azad. Mahadev's yearning to see Patel again in Congress's chair would remain unfulfilled. The Maulana's appointment did not satisfy the Muslim qaum. In March 1940, even as Azad asserted from Congress's chair that Muslims were "part of the indivisible unity that is Indian nationality",¹³ the League resolved in Lahore for separation, for "Pakistan". It also announced total opposition to any Congress-Raj agreement that did not concede Pakistan. "Providence," Azad argued, "brought us (Hindus and Muslims) together over a thousand years ago. We have fought, but so do blood-brothers fight. No, it is no use trying to emphasise the differences."¹⁴ Countering that the differences were unbridgeable, Jinnah asked: "Where is the country which is being divided? Where is the nation which is being denationalised?"¹⁵ The qaum heeded Jinnah, not Azad.

March 1940 was different from the summer of 1939, when Britain was almost Congress's friend and partner, and Congressmen thought they were steadily gaining the hill of independence. By imparting caution to the British and impatience to Indians, Hitler's war had broken up the Congress-Raj relationship; and now Jinnah stood between Congress and the Muslim qaum. Then there was Subhas. Jinnah howled, and the Raj snapped, when Congress demanded a transfer of power; Subhas growled when Congress did not.

Affirmation of the goal of freedom without aggressive acts against the British was, in these circumstances, Congress's strategy until March 1940. Not finding "any honest response" from the British, Gandhi, in his own phrase, "stiffened",¹⁶ but he was opposed to the mass disobedience that Jawaharlal recommended in April; he thought that disobedience might degenerate into Hindu-Muslim disturbances.

The Mahatma's approach to the Hindu-Muslim question was not Vallabhbhai's. Less patient than Gandhi, and less willing to believe Muslim complaints, Patel jumped on Syed Mahmud, the Bihari Congressman, when Mahmud charged at a WorCom session in April that Congress was indifferent to Muslim grievances.¹⁷ But Vallabhbhai agreed with Gandhi that the time was not opportune for a mass satyagraha. Keen, however, to avoid demoralization, Patel proposed disciplined disobedience by carefully chosen individuals.¹⁸

Vallabhbhai's advice was accepted by Gandhi and was about to be implemented when Hitler launched his blitzkrieg and changed the scene everywhere. Norway and Denmark, Holland and Belgium, even France collapsed before the Nazi tanks. In Britain, Churchill replaced Chamberlain as Prime Minister and Labour joined the coalition cabinet. And in India Congressmen thought afresh. They were divided. Some, led by C.R., sympathized with an England which had her back to the wall. They felt England might now transfer power if Congress helped her. Rajaji proposed that Congress should offer to join the war as an ally if Britain promised freedom for India at the end of the war and installed a representative government right away in New Delhi. Others, led by Subhas and Jayaprakash, saw no reason for expending sentiment on England or for expecting statesmanship from her.

Patel was in a dilemma. Rajaji's views made sense to him, and he wanted to see Congress back in power. Yet Gandhi had said that C.R.'s way could not be his; though his sympathies were still with England and France, the Mahatma could not, with his ahimsa, endorse Congress's participation in a violent war. Moreover, Gandhi did not think that England was likely to act handsomely by India: a series of talks with the Viceroy had convinced him of a Raj-League understanding to foil Congress.

C.R. enlisted one convert after another. Azad was among the first to back Rajaji but, in the Mahatma's words, "Sardar Patel was his greatest prize".¹⁹ Though he had accepted ahimsa in his battle for freedom, Vallabhbhai could not, as he put it, rule out "recourse to force in dealing with internal disorder and external attack".²⁰ Yet he was also pledged to following the Mahatma. "If you order me," he told Gandhi when the WorCom met in June in Wardha, "I will shut my eyes and obey you." "Don't," the Mahatma advised.²¹ Patel was to do what he thought was right. Sharing the thinking of Rajaji that Britain might accept the Congress demands and welcome an offer of active assistance in the war, Vallabhbhai voted for his proposal in the WorCom. Jawaharlal cast his vote against it, as did Ghaffar Khan and Kripalani, but Patel's backing proved decisive and the proposal was carried.

The rejection of Gandhi was explicit. The Mahatma was given "complete liberty of action to pursue his great ideal of non-violence".²² The parting of ways had occurred only four months after Gandhi had named Vallabhbhai, Mahadev and Narhari as the heirs of all his properties and vested in their care his writings' copyright.²³ Both the Mahatma and the Sardar were pained by the breach. While Narhari noted that Patel "passed through a very severe mental conflict",²⁴ Gandhi spoke of Vallabhbhai's "secession".²⁵

They did not strive to convert each other. Each knew his mind, and Gandhi, as we have seen, pressed Patel to act according to his own lights. Rajaji, however, had several talks with the Mahatma in Sevagram; Vallabhbhai would phone Mahadev from Bombay and obtain the gist of each talk. "What does the old man say?" was Sardar's standard question to Mahadev.²⁶ Affirming that the divergence did "not mean that our hearts also diverge", Gandhi claimed that "the Sardar will again be with me as before".²⁷ The prediction was to prove correct, but the "release" of the Mahatma from Congress's leadership shocked the public. It also foreshadowed the pain and pattern of 1946 and 1947.

Ghaffar Khan resigned from the WorCom. Narhari urged the GPCC to "follow the Mahatma and not Vallabhbhai, however distinguished his services might be".²⁸ However, the provincial committee overwhelmingly backed the Sardar. "Neither I nor anyone else should be dishonest with Bapu," he had told the members.²⁹

Subhas and Jayaprakash, their views unconcealed, were detained by the Raj in July. "Vallabhbhai and Rajaji have not hesitated to break with Gandhiji," Jayaprakash, writing from prison, said to Jawaharlal, adding, "You should resign your seat on the Working Committee."³⁰ Doing the opposite, Nehru voted for C.R.'s resolution when the AICC met in Poona at the end of July. It was ratified by 95 votes to 47.

Eighteen months after the preference for Subhas over Pattabhi, the Mahatma's view had again been rejected by Congress, this time because of the influence of Patel, C.R. and Azad. And Vallabhbhai had gone against Gandhi for the first time in 22 years. The Sardar spoke frankly about "the difference between Bapu and us" and added: "No one will be happier than I if my appreciation of the situation in the country is found to be wrong."³¹ Gandhi publicly backed Patel's independence:

*All honour to the Sardar for holding fast to his convictions. The Sardar is no man of words. He is a man of action. He does not look around or about himself when he has decided upon a course of action. He simply goes ahead. May he always be thus.*³²

Accurate as it was, the description did not apply to the instant case. Within a week of the Poona decision, Vallabhbhai wavered. He informed Gandhi that he was feeling "uneasy" about his stand and wondered whether his appreciation of the situation had not been "mistaken".³³ Similar doubts entered C.R.'s mind. "I see no greatness of conduct in Britain's present attitude towards India," he wrote to a friend.³⁴ On the other hand, a man like Jayaprakash, who felt Congress's offer to be weak-kneed, feared that Britain would grasp it.³⁵

Patel's and Rajaji's latest fears, and Gandhi's appreciation, were fully vindicated – and Jayaprakash's fears dispelled – when, early in August, Britain gave its reply to Congress. A Viceregal statement said that if the Raj, Congress, the League and the Princes reached agreement, a certain number of politicians might be included in the Executive Council of the Viceroy, who would however retain the last word. At the end of the war India would be offered not freedom but a body "to devise the framework of the new constitution". And the League and other non-Congress "elements in India's national life" were assured that Britain would never allow "their coercion into submission" to a Congress-controlled government.³⁶

Bitterly disappointed, Vallabhbhai was also hugely relieved. "He was again with the old man and it was as if a sack of stones had been taken off his back."³⁷ To Gandhi he said: "It shall never happen again in our lifetime."³⁸ The speeches he now made contained no doubt or uncertainty:

The British Government has begun to show itself in its true colours. It has begun to create division amongst us.

We were very patient, for...the British Government was up against a crisis, but now our patience is exhausted.

The British Government asks what will happen to us if they leave. Surely this is a strange question. It is as if a watchman were to say to his employer, "What will happen to you if I leave?" The answer will be: "You go your way. We shall either engage another watchman or learn to keep watch ourselves."

We must tell Mahatmaji to return to the Congress and that we shall do whatever he says. Let power go to others today.

*Thousands of people are going about in Europe not knowing when they will die. We too will show we are prepared to die.*³⁹

Patel's and Rajaji's brief "secession" had occurred, as the Mahatma put it, with the latter's "consent, nay encouragement", and was, in any case, over.⁴⁰ Yet it continued to trouble Gandhi. He felt it was linked to a shortcoming in him and spoke of his regret that his words had "lacked the power to convert the Sardar and Rajaji".⁴¹ To punish

himself for the supposed shortcoming, the Mahatma pondered a purifying fast. In retrospect his unease seems well-founded, for the 1940 secession, brief as it was, can be legitimately seen as a precursor of the 1947 gulf between Gandhi and Vallabhbhai. However, the Mahatma did not implement his threat to fast.

What he did carry out was the plan of selective disobedience that Patel had proposed in April. To do nothing would "kill the Congress organisation", but mass disobedience would hurt "the British people when their very existence hangs in the balance". Congress praised "the bravery and endurance shown by the British nation in the face of danger and peril", said it had "no ill-will against them" and said too that its defiance would be strictly limited.⁴² Candidates for satyagraha were recommended by provincial Congress committees but finally chosen by Gandhi, who looked for candidates committed to non-violence, spinning and caste equality.

Once selected, each satyagrahi recited the unlawful statement, "It is wrong to help the British war effort with men or money." Some subscribed to the sentence because of their opposition to violence, more because of the way Britain had treated India. About 700 courted arrest by the end of the year. By the summer of 1941, nearly 15,000 had been imprisoned. Heeding an injunction of the Mahatma, no Congressman troubled the Raj with disobedience during the Christmas season. Dramatizing India's continuing wish for freedom, the campaign was "the most disciplined and peaceful of all the civil disobedience movements in the history of our satyagraha struggle".⁴³

Vinoba Bhave was the first satyagrahi. Unknown at the time to most Indians, he was arrested on October 21. Gandhi had picked Jawaharlal as the second defier but Nehru was arrested before he could utter the unlawful phrase; a series of speeches made earlier by him were judged seditious. Vallabhbhai was 65 and tired but determined to offer himself. He would do so in Gujarat, not in Bombay. Arriving in Ahmedabad on November 10, he wrote to the Mahatma:

*Came here this morning. There is four or five days' work here. After completing it I intend to perform Ganesh poojan on the 15th and to start the journey on the 18th.... If Mahadev returns from Delhi and can come here on the 18th, it will be good....*⁴⁴

Patel had not suddenly turned religious. Performing Ganesh poojan meant informing the Raj that he intended to defy the law; starting the journey meant courting arrest. Keeping to the timetable, Vallabhbhai wrote on November 15 to Ahmedabad's district magistrate that he would recite the unlawful slogan at a public meeting on November 18. The Raj did not want the meeting

to take place. On the night of November 17 the police came to the Kanugas' home, where Patel was staying, and informed the Sardar that he was being arrested under the Defence of India Act. He did not mind this night-before move or the fact that he was running a fever. What he disliked was the termination of his chat with Mahadev, who had turned up only minutes before, having been sent by Gandhi in response to Vallabhbhai's letter. "How much time will you give me?" Patel asked the police officers. "You can take half-an-hour or 45 minutes," was the reply.⁴⁵ This interval he spent with Mahadev and in writing out a message for the people of Ahmedabad:

The Government is frightened of the meeting that was to be held tomorrow. That is why it is taking me tonight to Sabarmati Jail. I am sorry that I could not say farewell to the brothers and sisters of Ahmedabad.

But I have no new message to give. I support every word of the statement that Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru made before the Gorakhpur magistrate. Let that be taken as my message as well. We will meet again in free India.*⁴⁶

The Police vehicle having no roof, the unwell detenu went to Sabarmati prison in Dr Kanuga's car. Nandubehn Kanuga and Manibehn accompanied him to the jail gates. Repeating the 1930 exercise, Vallabhbhai stopped for five minutes en route at the Sabarmati Ashram, where Ravishankar and Narhari met him. Precisely at 11 p.m. the gates closed behind him.⁴⁷

Within days Patel was moved to a place he knew well, Yeravda, where the company included Bhulabhai, Kher, Mavlankar, Munshi, Morarji and Pakvasa. The Sardar informed Mahadev that Kher, Pakvasa and he had formed "a club of regular spinners" but added: "It is not possible to spin as much as last time, for the body refuses to cooperate."⁴⁸ Remembering his Gita-reading in Yeravda in the early thirties, he said in a letter to Gandhi:

*Do not worry about us. We are using our time to good purpose. The destruction going on in the world reminds one day and night of the Viraat Swaroop – the Lord the Terrible – described in the eleventh chapter of the Gitaji.*⁴⁹

Stirred by old memories, he wrote Mahadev an almost lyrical letter:

* after his arrest on October 31

I rest on a cot where Bapu's cot used to be, under that historic mango tree, gaze at the stars at night, and tell myself that I am back at the place that Bapu turned into a temple, where he completed his fast and the Poona Pact was signed.... I never dreamt that I would return to this sacred place. God's plan is amazing.⁵⁰

Vallabhbhai bristled when the Government made some difficulty about Mahadev coming to see him in prison. "The Superintendent," he wrote to Mahadev, "has the authority to permit relations to meet a prisoner, but since my colleagues in work are nearer to me than my blood relations, if they are not allowed, how can I see the blood relations?"⁵¹

His children and grandson Bipin, who was 13 now, were nonetheless in his thoughts. In his first letter from jail, addressed to Mahadev, he expressed his concern that Mani had "gone very weak".⁵² There was no doubt, however, about Manibehn's eligibility for satyagraha, and she was in prison within three weeks of her father's arrest. She was committed to the Belgaum Jail, as was Nandubehn, who too had courted arrest. Assuring Manibehn, in a letter, that he was looking after himself and not communicating his anxiety about her, Vallabhbhai added:

You don't have the facilities there that I get here, but then your powers of endurance are greater than mine, and I believe you will take care of your health.⁵³

Dahyabhai was allowed, on occasion, to visit his father, who did not implement the threat of not seeing his relations. Once or twice Dahyabhai's new wife Bhanumati also came. The Sardar, Manibehn and Bipin had attended their marriage in May in Baroda, where Bhanumati's brother Pashabhai did business. As the months passed, his intestines again troubled Patel. His companions would see "his stomach heaving"⁵⁴ and know that he was in pain, but Vallabhbhai would not speak of it. Morarji would afterwards recall that "instead of paying attention to his suffering, Sardar would make tea for us and serve us".⁵⁵ The tea-making also entered Munshi's record:

In Yeravda Jail I saw the intensely human side of Sardar's nature. He laughed, cracked jokes, told droll stories. He became our housekeeper, prepared tea for us, looked after our food.... When I was taken out in a stretcher in serious condition, I saw in this indomitable man's eyes what I had never seen before, humid tenderness.⁵⁶

His letters from Jail add up to a directory of the people he cared about. "What is A doing?" "How is B keeping?" "Why wasn't C writing?" "Where is D's son?" "So poor E is dead." Such were his remarks and inquiries. As Morarji would recall in 1987, Patel was loved by colleagues and party workers because "he cared for them and took steps to solve their financial or medical problems even before he was approached".⁵⁷ Jail limited what he could do for his associates but it scarcely banished them from his thoughts.

Word of killings in Ahmedabad in April 1941 stung him. Lives of innocent Hindus and Muslims had been lost, some Hindus had fled in fright, and his city had lost face. Learning that Mridula Sarabhai had done "fine work" during the riot, he sent her his "congratulations".⁵⁸ Months later, however, he would continue to speak of "the wounds that were inflicted on me, deep down within me, which have still not been healed".⁵⁹ Released in May, Manibehn went to Sevagram where Gandhi found her "extremely weak".⁶⁰ She wanted to court arrest again but the Mahatma stopped her:

*You are doing Father's work outside jail. By going to jail now you would only feel self-satisfied. When the time comes I will not hold you back even for a moment.*⁶¹

In August, a doctor examining Vallabhbhai suspected cancer of the rectum. The Sardar's reactions on hearing of the suspicion are unrecorded, but Gandhi wrote to friends of "the big load" on his mind.⁶² Within days, however, to the Mahatma's and others' relief, the conjecture was shown to be unfounded. But Patel's insides were bad enough and the Raj released him on August 20, nine months after he had been arrested.

He looked thin and dried-up and his voice was weak.⁶³ Jail had taken twenty pounds off him. Manibehn noted that he slept little at night, was restless by day and found it difficult, at times, to walk or even to breathe. Slowly, very slowly, sleep returned. Six hours of continuous sleep would make all the difference. He had spoken on the phone to Gandhi the morning after his release but did not leave Bombay for six weeks, during which he gave allopathy and homeopathy the chance to restore his health. Then, early in October, he went to the higher altitudes of Nasik and Deolali, where the Birlas and Walchand made arrangements for him and where he tapped the skills of ayurveda. He was not vacationing; letters, phone calls and visitors came and went. But sometimes those walking with him would hear an old incident, such as the story of a 35-year-old trial, retold.

Improvement, however, was barely perceptible. Well-wishers learning of his state sent anxious letters. His replies were spirited. To

Ghulam Rasul Qureshi of Sabarmati Ashram, whom he had long befriended, Vallabhbhai wrote:

*Don't worry about my health. I am taking good care of it. There is much left for me to do in this world, and I have faith that I will see the completion of what I have taken in hand....Ishwar, Khuda, is helping us.*⁶⁴

Gandhi insisted on treating Patel with mudpacks tied to the stomach, hipbaths and diet-control. Vallabhbhai experimented with these for about forty days in Sevagram. Morning and evening he walked with Gandhi. The Sardar did not think he was getting much stronger; Gandhi thought the course of treatment was not long enough. They talked strategy too and looked together at recent events. Germany had attacked Russia in June. Subhas Bose had slipped out of detention and out of India. Tagore had died in August. And Churchill had said in plain terms in September that the Atlantic Charter would not apply to India. On October 31 the Mahatma sent Patel a note:

*Bhai Vallabhbhai, I hear it is your birthday today....Remember we are not to go until we have attained Swaraj.*⁶⁵

His term over, C.R. had been let out on October 6. In November he journeyed to Sevagram and told Gandhi and Patel that he favoured suspending the satyagraha, which in any case was petering out, and giving Britain another chance. The Mahatma and the Sardar told him that they did not think that Britain would offer anything worthwhile. On December 4, three days after Vallabhbhai left Sevagram for Bombay, the Raj released Azad, Jawahar and all other satyagraha prisoners, but Gandhi declared that individual disobedience would continue, though WorCom and AICC members would not, for the time being, court re-arrest.

Pearl Harbour followed on December 7, Japan swept across the Pacific, the U.S.A. became a belligerent on the side of the Allies – and C.R.'s hands were strengthened. Meeting at Bardoli towards the end of December, the WorCom followed Rajaji's lead, recognized the "new world situation" and accepted the impossibility of defending India non-violently against a Japanese invasion. Suspending satyagraha, the WorCom offered cooperation to the Allies if India's freedom was declared. Remembering his "never again" word to the Mahatma, Patel did not join the "secession" this time but a majority of Congressmen did.

Gandhi, who spent a month in Bardoli under, as he put it, "Sardar's regime",⁶⁶ said that a Congress ready to join a war would

not be steered by him. But he did not disown the WorCom, and when the AICC met in Wardha in January, the Mahatma asked it to ratify the Bardoli step, his own opinions notwithstanding. Vallabhbhai and Prasad spoke against C.R.'s resolution in Wardha, and Jawaharlal said that Rajaji's was "a primrose path", but C.R.'s persuasiveness, the fact of Japan's sweep and Gandhi's counsel produced an endorsement of the Bardoli line. Gandhi had explained:

*That nothing is to be expected from the Government is probably too true....Only the resolution puts the Congress right with the expectant world. It is no longer open to the Government to say that Congress has banged the door to negotiation on the impossible ground of non-violence.*⁶⁷

It was at this AICC session, on January 15, 1942, that Jawaharlal was formally designated by Gandhi as his heir. Patel's soul must have been seared by the public nomination and by the fact that his own name was pronounced and rejected in the same breath. Declared the Mahatma:

*Pandit Jawaharlal and I have had differences from the moment we became co-workers, yet I have said for some years and say it now that not Rajaji, not Sardar Vallabhbhai, but Jawaharlal will be my successor. You cannot divide water by repeatedly striking it with a stick. It is just as difficult to divide us...When I am gone, he will speak my language.*⁶⁸

After meeting Jawaharlal in 1938 in England, Beatrice Webb, the socialist, recorded that she had been "struck more by his charm than by his force". While acknowledging Nehru's "aristocratic refinement and culture dedicated to the salvation of the underdog", Webb added: "But I doubt whether he has the hard stuff of a revolutionary."⁶⁹ With Vallabhbhai, on the other hand, it was always his force rather than his charm that people remembered. Mirabeau was only one of several to put him down as "masterful". Desiring, on an occasion in 1939, to affect Patel's views and the Mahatma's, Ghanshyamdas Birla, hardly a timid man himself, wrote to Mahadev: "I suggest that yourself, myself and Bapu should talk alone. In the presence of the Sardar, I have not got the nerve to launch an attack."⁷⁰

Why did the Mahatma prefer charm to force? We know that twelve years earlier Gandhi had been influenced by Jawahar's acceptability. Vallabhbhai was less popular than Jawaharlal with the country's youth, Left and Muslims. That position had not changed. Another key consideration, that of age, was unalterable, and a related one, of health, had changed to Patel's disadvantage. Though he pushed

himself and missed no meeting, open or closed-door, Vallabhbhai was "far from well" when the AICC met in Wardha.⁷¹ The Sardar had in fact been physically unfit from the summer of 1941 right up to the meeting where he was ruled out and Nehru proclaimed; and he was 66 plus. Jawahar was 52.

There were two other considerations, both quite crucial. Gandhi knew that Patel was there to supply a corrective, when necessary, to Jawaharlal, who would be *primus inter pares* and not the sole guide. A letter that the Mahatma had written in 1939 to Vallabhbhai confirms that he expected the Sardar to provide robust and critical fellowship to Nehru, and suggests that he expected men like C.R., Prasad, Azad and Jayaprakash to do likewise:

*Kishorlal was telling me yesterday that you had said, "Bapu has placed us in Jawaharlal's charge, so we must go on doing as he says." I hope this was only a joke. I have not handed you over to anyone....It will not do if all of you do not exercise your independent judgment.*⁷²

Secondly, the Mahatma may have felt that Jawaharlal was more likely than Patel to resent a number two position. He was certain, at any rate, that Vallabhbhai's commitment had nothing to do with rank. A letter that Gandhi wrote in 1937 to Nariman contains a significant assessment of Patel's character:

*The Sardar has no parliamentary ambition. He has no ambition for leadership either. Nature has endowed him with certain qualities and he uses them. You won't find him going to the Press and complaining if he loses hold on the populace.*⁷³

Manibehn's diary contains no reference to Gandhi's statement or the reaction of Vallabhbhai as he heard it at the AICC. For an instant his face may have shown something but no one recorded it; and he would surely have stifled any sigh or curse at its birth. Many, nonetheless, were surprised, for, as we have noted, the statement had been preceded by a 40-day period during which Patel was in the Mahatma's care in Sevagram.

*Rumour had it (Joachim Alva wrote some months after Gandhi's announcement) that the Sirdar was to be the successor to the Mahatma....He who sat at the feet of the Mahatma, through good and evil report, was associated with the Mahatma's succession, [but] the Mahatma's own word set the question at rest once and for all.*⁷⁴

There was a Patel-Gandhi talk on the morning of the 17th but the subject was the Sardar's diet. Earlier that morning, at six, Vallabhbhai and Mahadev went out together for a walk and possibly discussed Gandhi's announcement.⁷⁵ A five-week sojourn in a cottage near a lighthouse in Hazira-on-the-sea, ninety minutes by car from Surat, seemed to rebuild Patel's body. He was obeying Doctor Gandhi's regimen: meals of milk, raw or boiled vegetables and prunes, dates or papaya; immersion in tubs of hot or cool water; an hour's "burial" under the sand each day; daily walks and massage; a mudpack next to the stomach at night, and so on. His letters from Hazira suggest that he was enjoying a rare spell of calm and reflection.

*We sleep in the open, next to the lighthouse. The mangoes are overhead, the earth underneath, and the sea to our side. All night, every half-minute, a shaft of light from three bulbs in the lighthouse hits us in the face. The recurring beam seems to exhort us to stay clear of the three precipices of desire, anger and greed.*⁷⁶

A telegram from Mahadev brought word of the sudden death of Jamnalal Bajaj. "Numbed" for a moment by the news, Vallabhbhai wrote to Mahadev that Bajaj had been

*Bapu's true son, a shelter over Jankidevi (Bajaj's wife), the country's faithful servant, Congress's pillar, friend of many, sustainer of institutions, ally of the helpless cow, Wardha's lamp...*⁷⁷

"You should try to learn Urdu," Gandhi advised in a letter.⁷⁸ Patel's reply showed that he hadn't forgotten how to pull a leg, and that the Wardha announcement had not made him less frank or free with the Mahatma.

Sixty-six years are over and this earthen vessel is near to cracking. It is very late to learn Urdu but I will try. All the same, your learning Urdu doesn't seem to have helped. The more you try to get close to them, the more they flee from you.*⁷⁹

Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek, head of the Chinese government, visited India in February and talked with Gandhi and Jawaharlal. "What about the Sheikh of China?" Vallabhbhai asked Mahadev.⁸⁰ Gandhi replied that the discussions had led to nothing. Chiang desired Indo-British understanding for the sake of China's defence but was in no position to influence British or Indian attitudes.

* The Muslims, or Jinnah and the Muslim League

Vallabhbhai's mind travelled frequently to little Deevi, born in 1941 to Dahyabhai and Bhanumati. Deevi suffered from an incurable and advancing brain tumour. Though the Sardar told Bhanumati that "God gives children the strength to bear suffering" and asked her to "understand that Deevi was lying in the lap of the Lord",⁸¹ thoughts of the grandchild's agony gave him many a pang. "Poor little baby," he wrote to Mahadev from Hazira.⁸² When, at the end of 1943, Deevi eventually found her release, her grandfather was once more in prison.

Britain's great bastion in the east, Singapore, fell to the Japanese on 15.2.42. Rangoon was Japan's next target and it could be India after that. Japan's emergence at India's door induced different reactions in Congressmen. Embittered by the delay in independence and ignorant of Japanese aims, a minority looked forward to deliverance by the Asian power. The majority, and most of the leaders, Vallabhbhai included, felt that both Japan and the Raj had to be opposed; the Muslim League was a third foe. There was, though, one man, C.R., who said that Congress's quarrels with the Raj and the League had to be ended or put aside and all effort concentrated against what he saw as the danger and enemy number one, Japan. This was neither Patel's view nor the Mahatma's, but its repeated expression by C.R. confused the average Congressman, for Gandhi, the Sardar and Rajaji had stood together in the past. In a letter from Hazira, Vallabhbhai tackled C.R. on his "obsession" but the old ally refused to budge. "I can't understand what's happened to Rajaji," the Sardar said to Mahadev.⁸³

The war in Europe had pricked the bubble of the white man's superior civilization. Patel rubbed in the lesson in a speech he made in Anand on March 7:

The battles of today... take place in the skies. Wars take place under water. Both sides are robbers. Both are fighting in the name of God. Both claim to worship Christ. Both call themselves civilized and claim to preach to uncivilized people, but when history is written it will be said that they who were calling others uncivilized were themselves worse than animals.

*When such a devastating war is going on in the world, only one person keeps his feet solidly on the ground and says that those who fight with the sword will be destroyed by the sword.*⁸⁴

Sane as the Mahatma's non-violence was, he had taught, Vallabhbhai added, something more important still:

*However great the disorder, there is no reason why we should die the death of cats and dogs. There is one thing we ought to learn from Gandhiji and that is fearlessness.*⁸⁵

From Anand he went to Bakrol, where as a youth he had swotted for the pleaders' test, and to the homestead at Karamsad. His people sprinkled the streets with water in pleasure at his visit. To them he made a confession of faith:

*I do not believe in any caste or community. The whole of India is my village and men of all communities are my friends and relations....All are children of the same God. After a man dies, does anyone ask if the corpse is that of a Brahman or a Chamar?*⁸⁶

* * *

President Roosevelt of the U.S.A. and Generalissimo Chiang had urged Churchill to make a move towards Gandhi and the Congress but the British Premier was resistant. His hands were forced, however, once Rangoon fell on March 7. Four days later he announced that his cabinet colleague and the Leader of the House, Sir Stafford Cripps, would take new proposals to Delhi.

Cripps seemed ideally suited to the task. Belonging to the Labour party's Left wing, he was a friend of Nehru's. Like the Mahatma and Patel, he was a vegetarian. A brilliant lawyer, he had negotiated expertly, it was said, in Moscow, where he was the British Ambassador before Churchill asked him to join the cabinet. Arriving in Delhi on March 22, Cripps offered India full Dominion status after the war, with the right of secession from the Commonwealth. Also conceded was a post-war constituent assembly whose members would be chosen by provincial legislatures or nominated by the princes. As for the present, India could have, he said, a national government composed of representatives of the leading political parties.

Once India became a Dominion – after the war, in other words –, every province would have the right to secede and obtain a status equal to that of the Indian Dominion. Cripps incorporated this clause to obtain Jinnah's acceptance but he gave Congressmen his personal view that "no province would, in fact, demand that right".⁸⁷ A little over two years earlier, when he was not in office, Cripps had told the House of Commons, during a debate on India, that "you are not justified in taking away the rights of a majority because you assert that you desire to protect the minority". India, he had then said, was no different from "Poland with its Russian, Jewish, German and Polish citizens" or from "Czechoslovakia with its Sudetens. Czechs and

Slovaks".⁸⁸ Now, however, Cripps was willing to contemplate India's Balkanization. Jinnah welcomed the secession clause as "a recognition of Pakistan by implication" but rejected the scheme because it gave provinces and not what he called "the Muslim nation" the right to separate.⁸⁹

After one short look at the package, which "embodied different items palatable to different tastes",⁹⁰ Gandhi said it was unacceptable. Vallabhbhai was equally opposed. Shortly before Cripps's arrival he had accused Britain of "encouraging the Muslims to be intransigent".⁹¹ Cripps's secession clause had supplied proof.

Gandhi returned to Wardha from Delhi after pronouncing his opinion but Vallabhbhai remained in Delhi: Azad, the Congress President, Jawaharlal and C.R. wanted to continue talking with Cripps. Eager for national power, fearful of Japanese aggression and sympathetic to China, these three focussed on the proposal for an immediate national government, ignoring the secession clause as also the princes' right to nominate delegates to the constituent assembly. The Mahatma was surprised and even annoyed that Patel had acquiesced in the talks' continuance, in Gandhi's view an exercise in "churning water to obtain butter".⁹² "You just stayed on and on in the capital," the Mahatma complained to Vallabhbhai.⁹³

Patel had stayed on because the WorCom was still to conclude its deliberations, not because he was inclined to agree with Cripps's scheme. Four months later, after Congress had resolved on Quit India, Vallabhbhai would say of Cripps's plan that "no more mischievous scheme had been conceived".⁹⁴ He may not have used this language at the WorCom meetings in Delhi, but Azad's memoirs, and Prasad's, confirm that Vallabhbhai had opposed Cripps's scheme in Delhi.⁹⁵

In the end Azad, Jawaharlal and C. R. also advocated the scheme's rejection. The Maulana charged that Cripps had gone back on his word, given when the talks began, that the new government would function like a cabinet and that the Viceroy would only be a constitutional head. It was a charge that Linlithgow would also level. He would tell Wavell in 1943: "Cripps did not play straight over the question of the Viceroy's veto and cabinet responsibility and did make some offer to Congress."⁹⁶ Azad, Jawaharlal and Rajaji also objected to the provision that defence would, in substance, remain the charge of the British Commander-in-Chief, and Cripps's effort collapsed. He left India on April 12, but not before making a "personal and private" appeal to Jawaharlal. Signing himself "Yours always affectionately, Stafford", he asked Nehru, in a letter, to show "the supreme courage of a great leader", that is, to defy all his colleagues.⁹⁷ Jawaharlal did not bite, but he became uncertain and indecisive.⁹⁸

Though they did not realize it at the time, Patel, Azad and Jawaharlal had taken a step, in their answer to Cripps, towards the acceptance of

Pakistan. Feeling compelled – under the pressure of Cripps's arguments and the League's propaganda – to declare its stand on self-determination, the WorCom clarified that it could not "think in terms of compelling the people of any territorial unit to remain in an Indian Union against their declared and established will".⁹⁹ Vallabhbhai was associated with this commitment, which was in all probability drafted by Jawaharlal and desired, in the first instance, by Azad.¹⁰⁰

In March 1942, for the first time in over a year, Indians heard the voice of Subhas. It came over Radio Berlin and confirmed that Subhas was willing to take the Axis powers' help for Indian independence. Jawaharlal declared on April 12 that he "would even oppose Subhas"¹⁰¹ on the battlefield, but many Indians admired Bose's enterprise and resourcefulness. In Azad's view, Gandhi was one of them. "Many of his remarks," the Maulana later wrote, "convinced me...that Subhas Bose's escape made a great impression on Gandhiji."¹⁰²

We have seen that anti-British Japan had some admirers in India. Their ranks increased after the Cripps visit, which seemed, in retrospect, an exercise in deception, a ploy to show the world that England was reasonable and Indians hopelessly divided. How was Congress to respond? Starting from his premise that Japan was enemy number one, C.R. proposed that Congress should arrange peace with at least one foe, the Muslim League. Once that was done, Britain would have to grant independence, India would fight alongside the allies, and Japan would be stopped.

The Mahatma's premise, on the other hand, reinforced by the Cripps exercise, was that Britain was not willing to leave. Unwillingness to part with power, preparedness to divide India and an apparent readiness to evacuate India – even as Malaya, Singapore and Burma had been evacuated – had earned the British the hatred of India. To Gandhi there was only one way to "turn the hatred into affection": "orderly British withdrawal" or Quit India. Once Britain withdrew, Hindus and Muslims would settle their disputes. By withdrawal he meant, Gandhi clarified, not the physical departure of every Englishman but "the withdrawal of British domination", whereby "every Englishman can be converted into a friend"¹⁰³

Vallabhbhai had not the slightest difficulty choosing between the Mahatma and Rajaji. In his search for Hindu-Muslim unity, C.R. interpreted the WorCom's acknowledgment of self-determination as acceptance of "the principle of Pakistan". To Patel the interpretation was outrageous. However, guided by Rajaji, Madras's Congress legislators proposed, on April 24, that the AICC should accept the League's claim for separation of the Muslim-majority areas. "Deeply hurt" when he learnt from the radio of this development,¹⁰⁴ the Sardar

remonstrated with C.R. and attacked the proposal publicly. Yet their friendship survived. At the end of April the two travelled together to Allahabad for meetings of the WorCom and the AICC. Recorded Manibehn: "A few Hindu Mahasabha youths came with black flags to Allahabad station to demonstrate against Rajaji, who got out of the station alone, leaving his luggage with us."¹⁰⁵

The AICC rejected C.R.'s pro-Pakistan proposal 120 to 15, whereupon Rajaji took the issue to the public. "Raja is raining poison," Patel said to Mahadev. "He has a craving for fighting the Japanese."¹⁰⁶ Holding that Rajaji's speeches violated Congress discipline, Vallabhbhai felt that C.R. should resign his seat in the Madras Assembly. As the CPB chairman it was the Sardar's right to read the law to Rajaji but he did not directly do so. At his instance Gandhi wrote to C.R.:

*Vallabhbhai is firmly of opinion that in carrying your propaganda you are breaking the written word. It is your duty to resign the membership of the Assembly. You should obey Vallabhbhai's ruling.*¹⁰⁷

Also, while he welcomed Rajaji's "free expression of views",¹⁰⁸ Gandhi nonetheless advised him that "it will be most becoming for you to sever your connection with the Congress and then carry on your campaign with all the zeal and ability you are capable of."¹⁰⁹ Resigning from Congress and the Assembly both, C.R. persisted with his bid. Though well aware of Rajaji's stubbornness, and telling Mahadev that "Raja wouldn't listen to any other point of view",¹¹⁰ Patel did not give him up. At the end of June, Manibehn and Pashabhai (Dahyabhai's brother-in-law) met C.R. off his train in Bombay and brought him, under Vallabhbhai's instructions, to the Marine Drive flat. A bid by Bhulabhai to host Rajaji was forestalled.¹¹¹ C.R. spent six nights under Patel's roof but stuck to his views.

Vallabhbhai was the first of the Mahatma's colleagues, and Jawaharlal the last, to agree with Quit India. It was at its end-April meeting in Allahabad that the WorCom first discussed the idea, embodied in a draft that Gandhi, who did not come to Allahabad, had sent. "It will be up to you," Mahadev had written to Patel, "to get the resolution passed."¹¹² The Sardar was to get the job done, overcoming expected opposition from Jawaharlal, but the irony – bitter for Patel and exquisite for Jawaharlal – was that shortly before the Allahabad meeting the Mahatma repeated his "successor" remarks. "Those like Sardar Vallabhbhai," said Gandhi, "who have followed me without question cannot be called heirs. Jawaharlal has the drive that no one else has in the same measure."¹¹³

Jawaharlal said in Allahabad that he was opposed to Gandhi's draft because to him it conveyed sympathy with Japan and the expectation that the Axis powers would win.¹¹⁴ "Britain is incapable of defending India", Gandhi's draft had said. "Japan's quarrel is not with India. She is warring against the British Empire", it had added. But the draft also said that "if Japan attacks India", India was to offer "complete non-cooperation to the attacker". It asserted, too, that "if the attacker wishes to take possession of our fields, we will refuse to give them up even if we have to die in the effort to resist him."¹¹⁵

These prescriptions were scarcely pro-Japanese and certainly Gandhi himself was not. Patel backed his proposal unreservedly. He agreed with the remark about Britain's capacity to defend India. When, prior to Cripps's visit, Singapore had fallen, Vallabhbhai had himself spoken of "the watchman running away" from "India's front line of defence...Singapore".¹¹⁶

A call to the British to "withdraw from India", carrying the implication that Congress would launch a struggle to enforce it, was the essence of Gandhi's proposal.¹¹⁷ It produced misgivings in Jawahar. Only two weeks earlier, perturbed by Japan's advance, anxious for China and Russia and influenced by Cripps's personal appeals, he was on the verge of making a broadcast from the Raj's radio station, urging Indians not to embarrass the war effort, but Azad had dissuaded him.¹¹⁸ C.R. supported Jawaharlal and said that withdrawal was a wrong demand. In his view, Britain could not "add to her crimes the crowning offence of leaving the country in chaos to become a certain prey to foreign ambition".¹¹⁹

"Of all the Working Committee members Vallabhbhai gave the most vehement support to Gandhi,"¹²⁰ a Raj official noted after studying a seized record of the deliberations. Said Patel:

Cripps is a clever fellow....The draft is a perfect reply to his propaganda....I have placed myself in the hands of Gandhiji. I feel that he is instinctively right, the lead he gives in all critical situations.

*In Bardoli it was made clear that the door was still open and our sympathies were with the allies. It is time the door is finally closed after the repeated insults heaped upon us. I agree with the draft before us. If there is any pro-fascist hint in the draft let it be removed.*¹²¹

Behind the "instinctively right" remark lay his remembrance of the fruitfulness of other steps that Gandhi had intuitively taken or advised: Champaran, the stand against Rowlatt, Chauri Chaura, the salt march, the fast under Yeravda's mango tree. Prasad edited Gandhi's draft, altering the phrases that could be misconstrued as being

pro-Japanese. Eleven voted for it. Six of them – Vallabhbhai, Prasad, Kripalani, Shankarrao Deo of Maharashtra, Prafulla Ghosh of Bengal and Sarojini Naidu – were members, and five invitees: Jairamdas Doulatram of Sind, the socialists Narendra Dev and Achyut Patwardhan, Gopinath Bardoloi of Assam and Biswanath Das of Orissa. An alternative draft that Jawaharlal had prepared was favoured by six: Nehru, Bhulabhai Desai, Pant and Asaf Ali, who were members, and Vijayalakshmi Pandit and S. Satyamurti, invitees. Azad, the President, did not vote and Rajaji chose to support neither. To him even Nehru's draft, asking Britain to "abandon her hold on India" with immediate effect, was unrealistic.

The Gandhi/Prasad draft was approved on the morning of April 30. In the afternoon, however, Prasad withdrew it and offered to accept Nehru's text. He wanted, Prasad afterwards explained, "to maintain party unity". Moreover, Prasad added, Nehru had "incorporated a substantial part of Gandhi's proposal in his resolution".¹²² Kripalani, a participant, has recorded that the reversal followed a statement from Azad that "he would resign" if the Gandhi/Prasad wording was not "materially altered". A reminder that he had not objected to the resolution when it was passed had no effect on the Maulana.¹²³ Manibehn, who too, "following a nod from the Maulana", was present, noted in her diary that as a result of some remarks from Azad

*Rajendra Babu succumbed and said, "All right then, let's have Jawaharlal's draft." Father was against taking up the new resolution but Rajendra Babu was unable to hold the line. It was all very hurtful and unfair.*¹²⁴

Despite a sense of injury, Patel did not vote against the Nehru draft, which was passed unanimously. He and the others, in Kripalani's words, "reluctantly consented to cancel" the earlier resolution.¹²⁵ Azad's intervention had torpedoed Vallabhbhai's expectations. He could not now send a "mission accomplished" message to the Mahatma, who however remarked that Nehru's resolution "allowed him enough scope for work".¹²⁶ Though not asking the British "to withdraw from India", the resolution said that Congress would find "it impossible to consider any schemes which retain, even in a partial measure, British control over India".¹²⁷ It took Gandhi forward but his response to an account by Kripalani of the Allahabad episode was, "You should have allowed the Maulana to resign."¹²⁸

"I used to say," Gandhi admitted, "that my moral support was entirely with Britain. Today, though I do not wish any humiliation to Britain, and therefore no defeat, my mind refuses to give her any moral support. British behaviour towards India has filled me with great pain." Appalled by Britain's readiness to split India and to

evacuate, the Mahatma was also swayed by reports that Indians returning from Burma faced discrimination. "One route for the whites, another for the blacks," Gandhi exclaimed. "Provision of food and shelter for the whites, none for the blacks!"¹²⁹ Persuaded that Britain was in India to defend British interests, not India, Gandhi wanted her to quit.

Patel was not fooled by Japan. At the end of July he would say: "The Japanese radio proclaims every day that they do not want to conquer any part of India and that they are only fighting to drive the British out. Some of our people have swallowed this Japanese bait....Subhas Bose is already in Japan. But we are not so gullible as to accept the propaganda of the Japanese or the Russians. We cannot believe that they will come and liberate us."¹³⁰ Yet Britain had embittered him, and sorrow or sympathy was not his first reaction to news of a British reverse. For instance, in a speech he made just before the fall of Rangoon he had said:

*Singapore has fallen. Malaya is lost. Sumatra and Java have been overrun, and in a couple of days Rangoon too may fall. Now the British say, "Help us." What help can we give? Do they want us as corpse-bearers?*¹³¹

He could not repress an occasional jibe of this kind but, as even the Raj recognized at the time, there was "nothing to indicate that he had pro-fascist or pro-Japanese tendencies".¹³² In the Government's view, Vallabhbhai's "was a bitter opposition to Britain amounting to hatred and [to him] anything was better than that Britain should be allowed to stay. He thought there was a chance to resist Japan if they were allowed to go about it with their hands free."¹³³

Jawaharlal asked Gandhi on May 27 if he realized that the Americans thought he had become pro-Japanese. "What am I to do," Gandhi replied, "if people imagine something that is not even in my dreams?"¹³⁴ The Mahatma's opposition to Japanese aggression was spelt out in a letter he wrote at the end of May to Mirabeau, who was in Orissa and had sought advice for people on the coast who feared a Japanese invasion. Replied the Mahatma:

*One thing they should never do – to yield willing submission to the Japanese. They must not escape from one fire only to fall into another and probably more terrible. Their attitude must therefore always be of resistance to the Japanese.*¹³⁵

Gandhi and Patel agreed with Rajaji that Britain was not likely to "leave the country in simple response to a Congress slogan".¹³⁶ They envisaged a struggle. Victory in it was hardly likely, for Britain

possessed state power and gun-power, but the struggle would accord with India's passionately anti-British feeling. The sentiment was in Gandhi's breast, too. "Let us breathe the air of freedom....I want the present sham to end," he said.¹³⁷ The British might not leave, but the act of defiance would itself constitute freedom. Yet Gandhi and Vallabhbhai were not just advocating action for action's sake. Quit India had logic as well as sentiment. In the hot summer of 1942, passivity or an appeal for patience would have isolated Congress, allowing violent and pro-Axis elements and Subhas Bose to capture the Indian mind. Though addressed to Britain, the Quit India call was also meant for Indian ears.

Jawaharlal and Azad tried hard and long to resist it but in the summer of 1942 the joint opposition of Congress's President and the Mahatma's designated successor was of no avail. Patel and Prasad wrote to Azad in May that they and others were willing to leave the WorCom in view of "fundamental differences".¹³⁸ In June Vallabhbhai said he would resign from the WorCom if it did not sanction Quit India and added that Prasad and some others would do likewise.¹³⁹ The resignations were not accepted because Azad and Jawaharlal knew that Congress was with Gandhi. Fervent about Quit India, the Congress Socialists criticised Jawaharlal's hesitation and found common ground, for the first time, with the Sardar. Willing to cooperate with them, Patel helped one of the socialists, Yusuf Meherally, to become the Mayor of Bombay and another, Asoka Mehta, to head the city Congress's volunteer wing.¹⁴⁰

In July, when the WorCom met in Wardha for nine days, a determined Gandhi told Azad and Jawaharlal that they were free to do as they pleased, and to resign if they must.¹⁴¹ Anxious to work Quit India rather than discuss it, Vallabhbhai told the WorCom that "he was opposed to delay and thought a movement might have been launched immediately after the departure of Cripps."¹⁴² Jawaharlal and Azad fell in when the Mahatma told them that he did not need Congress for his move. "The sands of India," he said, "would throw up a movement larger than Congress."¹⁴³ A significant concession, and a departure from non-violence, had earlier been made by Gandhi. Acknowledging that "abrupt withdrawal of the Allied troops might result in Japan's occupation of India and China's sure fall," he said in June that "to prevent Japanese occupation", Allied troops could remain in India after British rule ended.¹⁴⁴

The concession was incorporated in the WorCom's Quit India resolution, the core of which was a warning that if the British power did not accept its appeal, Congress would "be reluctantly compelled to utilize all its non-violent strength".¹⁴⁵ Manibehn's diary records that at the concluding WorCom session Gandhi "made a few suggestions for the struggle".¹⁴⁶ These are not spelt out but Patel's

subsequent utterances suggest that the Mahatma contemplated an all-out struggle and one that would not necessarily be halted if non-Congressmen committed acts of violence.

Vallabhbhai had disliked the long Wardha discussions and had not gone to all of them. Allergic to the heat in and around Wardha, he had said in May that it was “cruel, violent and suicidal” on the Mahatma’s part to keep Kasturba, other elderly people and himself in Sevagram.¹⁴⁷ He had managed, however, thanks to Mahadev’s reports, to stay abreast of Jawaharlal’s talks with the Mahatma, Azad’s visits and other pertinent happenings.

All questioning was over now, and Patel was free for action. True, the AICC was to meet in Bombay on August 7 to ratify the Wardha resolution but its decision was a certainty. The heart, soul and body of Vallabhbhai, the last wearied and in disrepair – a report that Patel “is believed to be dying” was forwarded by Lumley, the Bombay Governor, to Linlithgow on June 6¹⁴⁸ –, were thrown into Quit India from the instant the WorCom endorsed it on July 14.

“Finding places on the train with great difficulty”,¹⁴⁹ he and Manibehn arrived in Bombay on July 15. To ignite men was his aim. He met one activist after another, spent time with party workers at Congress House, wrote notes to people in Gujarat, obtained money from Walchand, Rameshwar Birla and Brijmohan Birla, talked privately with journalists. On the 21st morning he arrived in Ahmedabad and conferred immediately with a core group. Over the next ten days, workers turning up from all parts of Gujarat and surroundings met him in incessant sequence. During “free” minutes he wrote letters to potential fighters elsewhere.

On the 26th he addressed a huge public meeting at the Local Board maidan. Activists of Ahmedabad city met him as a group on the 27th. In the Raj’s view, Vallabhbhai’s words at this private meeting were “the most inflammatory of which we have knowledge”. According to an intelligence report, Patel said:

If all the leaders are arrested tomorrow and there is no time to meet again, you should carry on the programme set forth before you by Gandhi from 1919 until now. Die but do not fall back. This time, if a railway line is removed or an Englishman is murdered, the struggle will not be stopped....

*Carry this message to every nook and corner of Gujarat....Put aside the constructive programme now and be ready to carry out Gandhi’s firmans. Congressmen of course must act strictly within the limits of non-violence, even if Gandhi and the other leaders are arrested before the AICC meeting.*¹⁵⁰

He wasn't sleeping well and his stomach annoyed him but these were matters to be ignored. He saw Kasturbhai Lalbhai, the industrialist, more than once. All the veterans met him: Ravishankar, Narhari, Ashabhai of Ras, Darbar Gopaldas, Raojibhai, Shivabhai of Bhadran, Dhebar of Rajkot, plus scores of others. On the 28th he talked to journalists and students in two colleges. The next evening an immense crowd of students heard him say at the Local Board maidan that "the struggle would be short and swift and finished within a week".¹⁵¹

Party workers from Ahmedabad district met him on the 30th. On the 31st he went to Nadiad, where he conferred with Kheda district activists, the men of Nadiad town, people from Karamsad and Bochasan and addressed a public meeting. On the train to Baroda that evening "there were crowds at every station". Activists huddled with him when the train stopped at Anand. Praja Mandal workers talked with him in Baroda on the morning of August 1. There were several meetings, including a public rally, in Surat later that day. At 5.30 a.m. on the 2nd he was back at Bombay Central station. What he had told Gujarat was this:

The Congress has been charged with stabbing Britain in the back. It is really a question of pushing them off our chest.

For the people of a country which wishes to be independent there can be only one burning desire: to drive out their present rulers and to do everything possible to prevent others from taking their place.

This struggle will be all-embracing...Congress will welcome non-payment of taxes, civil disobedience and such direct actions as will obstruct the Government.

Let the railwaymen refuse to work on behalf of the railways. Let the post and telegraph men go on strike. Let Government servants give up their service. Let teachers and students keep away from schools and colleges and thus cooperate in bringing to a standstill the entire administrative machinery.

*If there is your wholehearted support, the struggle will be over and won in a matter of days. The British will have to quit.*¹⁵²

Meeting the accusation that Congress desired power for itself more than freedom for India, Vallabhbhai had said in Surat:

*Let Britain only transfer power to Indian hands, whether it is to the Muslim League or any other party, and the Congress will dissolve itself. Congress was started with the independence of India as its main and only goal. Once that is achieved, Congress would willingly cease to function.*¹⁵³

Twelve hours after returning to Bombay, Patel addressed a great gathering on the Chowpatty sands and called, as he had done in Ahmedabad, for "a complete standstill", to be achieved by abstention from work in vital installations and services. His remarks included a reference to an announcement by the Raj that the Communist Party was no longer banned:

Probably the ban on the Communist party has been removed because the Government intends to use the Communists against the Congress. But I am sure that my Communist friends have sufficient patriotism not to become a prey to such plans.

I hope that the people of Bombay will give a good account of themselves when the movement starts. This is the last movement to be launched by Gandhiji, who has undertaken to lead it at an advanced age fully knowing the implications.

The movement will be based on complete non-violence and no one would be required to carry a gun or even a lathi.¹⁵⁴

At eleven next morning, August 3, Vallabhbhai was at Dadar station to receive the Mahatma, who was arriving from Wardha. Jawaharlal arrived that day too, his doubts about Quit India a thing of the past. Accompanied by his daughter Indira and son-in-law Feroze, he called on Patel at Hem Prabha. The WorCom met on the 4th, 5th, 6th, 7th and 8th; the AICC on the 7th and 8th; there were individual meetings between the sessions and at night. On August 4 Vallabhbhai made time to take Doctor Jivraj Mehta to see an old friend, Mathuradas Trikamji, who was ailing. The Mahatma and Patel frequently ate together at Birla House, where Gandhi lodged, and met at other times as well. Coordination between the two was close and complete. At 2.45 p.m. on the afternoon of August 7, Vallabhbhai took Gandhi to the AICC at Gowalia Tank. The crowd was thick and the two "got in with difficulty".¹⁵⁵ Jawaharlal moved the main resolution. At 7.30 p.m., Patel seconded it:

You say the Congress wants the Japanese to come. It is an abominable lie.

Singapore you tom-tommed all over the world as the most vulnerable outpost....The bubble of your omnipotence has burst. The Governor of Burma boasts in London that they left Burma only after reducing everything to dust. So you promise the same thing to India?

You refer in your radio broadcasts and newspapers to the government established in Burma by Japan as a puppet government? What sort of government do you have in Delhi now?

When France fell before the Nazi onslaught, in the midst of total war, Mr Churchill offered union with England to the French. That was indeed a stroke of inspired statesmanship.

But when it comes to India? Oh no! Constitutional changes in the midst of a war? Absolutely unthinkable.

We have heard of a woman's hath (wilfulness), a child's hath and a ruler's hath. But the British have discovered a fourth hath – peechhe hath (retreat).

(Addressing the Indian people) Do not believe the professions of Japan. From her acts in Manchuria, China and elsewhere, it is clear that Japan is following the same ambition of empire-building as England and even outdoing her. The object this time is to free India before the Japanese can come and be ready to fight them if they come.

They will round up the leaders, round up all. Then it will be the duty of every Indian to put forth his utmost effort – within non-violence. No source is to be left untapped; no weapon untried. This is going to be the opportunity of a lifetime.¹⁵⁶

The applause was loud and long. Jawaharlal and Kripalani came up to congratulate Vallabhbhai. Work was resumed in the morning. Patel met Diwakar of Karnataka, Bari of Jamshedpur, Jagat Narain Lal of U.P. and sat at a WorCom session. In the afternoon he took Gandhi to the AICC where Quit India was proclaimed and Gandhi authorized to start "a mass struggle on non-violent lines on the widest possible scale".¹⁵⁷ Only 13 votes were cast against the motion. The Mahatma said that every Indian had to do or die. "Our struggle is now to start," he added. "But before launching the movement I will address a letter to the Viceroy and wait for his reply."¹⁵⁸

From 7.30 to 9.30 p.m. Gandhi and the Sardar were together at Birla House, conferring, dining, praying. At 11 p.m. Vallabhbhai and Manibehn returned home. The phone rang. It was Pakvasa, saying that he had heard that Azad was to be arrested in the night.¹⁵⁹ Actually the Raj had made plans, as Patel knew they would, to arrest everybody.

The men came at five in the morning of August 9, took him and Kripalani, who was lodged with the Sardar at Hem Prabha, to VT station and put them on a train. Also brought to it were the Mahatma, Mahadev, Sarojini Naidu and Mirabehn; Azad, Nehru and the rest of the WorCom; and a number of Bombay Congressmen including Yusuf Meherally and Asoka Mehta. Vallabhbhai, Azad and a few others entered Gandhi's compartment to talk with him but were soon directed by the Raj's police to return to their seats. "I don't think I will see you again," Patel said as he farewelled the Mahatma and Mahadev.¹⁶⁰ The train proceeded towards Poona. The Mahatma,

Mahadev, Mirabehn and Sarojini were removed from it at Chinchwad, to be taken, Vallabhbhai and the rest were told, to the Aga Khan's house in Poona. A few minutes later, at Kirkee, the Bombay Congressmen were taken off to be sent to Yeravda Jail.

Patel had imagined that he too would be back at Yeravda but realized his mistake when he and the rest of the WorCom were ordered to remain on board at Kirkee and again, a few minutes later, at Poona Main. An hour after the train had steamed out of Poona he gathered that they were being taken to Ahmednagar Fort.

The low roof of the van that took the party from Ahmednagar station to the Fort obliged the prisoners to lower their heads and bend their backs. At the gate of the Fort a British police official handed a sheet of paper to a white army officer, who called out one by one the names on the sheet and directed each prisoner to enter the Fort. Vallabhbhai, Azad, Jawaharlal and nine others were to spend the next three winters inside. A warship had been kept ready at Bombay harbour to take Gandhi to Aden and the WorCom to Nyasaland but the Raj wisely chose to confine its prisoners on Indian soil. The revolt that followed would have been fiercer still had the leaders been deported.

* * *

The Raj was better organized for crushing the revolt than Congress was for executing it. The machinery for arresting Congressmen, suppressing defiance, breaking strikes and making propaganda was in place well before the AICC proclaimed Quit India. Though he too had received word of impending arrests, Gandhi thought that action might be withheld until Linlithgow heard from him, if not until the actual start of mass action, which the AICC had sanctioned but not inaugurated.

Patel entertained no such hope. As his remarks to the Ahmedabad activists indicate, he had not ruled out arrests before the AICC met. Almost every speech of his referred to "a short, swift struggle": he knew the Raj would hit back, and soon. This was also why he was keen, in that crucial pre-arrest period, to spell out how Indians could revolt; later on he might not be able to. The Sardar's outline proved useful. "The Bombay people had only Vallabhbhai Patel's speeches to act upon and they followed his programme," one of the arrested protesters told the Raj.¹⁶¹ Moreover, Patel's strategy of "a complete standstill" was, in the circumstances, the only one with a chance, though very slender, of succeeding. If the railways, post and telegraph offices, munitions factories and government offices had in fact been boycotted wholesale by their Indian employees, the Raj would have come to a halt.

In the event it did not, yet 1942 witnessed what the Viceroy termed, in a cable to Churchill, "by far the most serious rebellion since that of 1857".¹⁶² Here and there – in parts of Bengal, Maharashtra, U.P. and Bihar – pockets declared themselves free. Factories went silent. Protesting Indians streamed out of bazars, villages and colleges and condemned the arrests. They were fired at, and six hundred were killed in the first few days of the August movement. Trains were derailed, telephone and telegraph wires cut, police stations and post offices burnt down. Press censorship helped contain the rebellion but the public's "general conspiracy of silence" (a phrase of the Raj's officials)¹⁶³ hindered the capture of rebels who had gone underground. Though incidents would continue for several months, the back of the rebellion was broken by the end of August. The House of Commons was told that over a thousand were killed by the end of November but the actual figure was doubtless much higher. About 100,000 Indian nationalists were jailed, the bulk of them for the duration of the war. Though the British did not quit, they learnt that they would have to.

The Raj recognized the tireless and fruitful role of a supposedly dying man in strengthening the revolt.

Lumley to Linlithgow, 27.8.42: Vallabhbhai spent some time in Gujarat. Before his arrival, Congress followers were depressed at the prospect of a movement for which they could see little hope of success, but Patel was entirely successful in inspiring them with enthusiasm....

*Patel was equally successful amongst Congress followers in Bombay. Here again there was little enthusiasm for the movement, but after his first enormous meeting in Bombay, which was attended possibly by a lakh of people, the atmosphere completely changed and became definitely revolutionary in outlook....*¹⁶⁴

Since the 1942 revolt was widespread, powerful and in part violent, some in the Raj assumed that astute planning lay behind it and sought to connect Gandhi and Patel with the violence. One Governor, Hallett of the U.P., spoke of "a preconcerted central plan" carried out through "oral instructions".¹⁶⁵ This was speculation and prejudice. The Raj tried hard, in Linlithgow's words, "to show to India and the world that Congress was responsible for the rebellion", but the Viceroy had to confess in January 1943 that "we have not yet got the link between the campaign of violence and the Working Committee".¹⁶⁶ Linlithgow did not get the link because it wasn't there. Yet "Congress violence" was the central theme of the Raj's propaganda.

Examining Patel's pre-arrest speeches and in particular his remarks to the Ahmedabad activists (quoted earlier), a Raj official concluded: "It is likely that he (Patel) had a more personal part in the actual issue of instructions of sabotage than any of the other leaders."¹⁶⁷ Not a scrap of evidence was cited for this conjecture, which formed the sole basis for a remark by Linlithgow to Hallett in January 1943 that "we have very nearly got a link between violence and the Congress leadership in the case of Patel".¹⁶⁸ No evidence of Vallabhbhai instructing sabotage has ever come to light. It is likely, however, that some who cut lines of communication or transport drew encouragement from Patel's observation that the movement would not be stopped because of acts of violence.

We have noted that in 1942 Gandhi, too, was prepared to co-exist with some acts of violence. His celebrated August 9 instruction, conveyed via his secretary Pyarelal, proves both his attachment to non-violence and his readiness to continue with the struggle even if it attracted some violent participants:

*Let every non-violent soldier of freedom write out the slogan "do or die" on a piece of paper or cloth and stick it on his clothes, so that in case he died in the course of offering satyagraha, he might be distinguished by that sign from other elements who do not subscribe to non-violence.*¹⁶⁹

* * *

Ahmednagar Fort was built in the middle of the 16th century by Hussain Nizam Shah. His daughter Chand Bibi defended it valiantly against two sieges but was murdered in the second. Thereafter it was alternately in Muslim and Maratha hands until 1803, when it was surrendered to the Duke of Wellington.

A mile-long wall of stone encircled the Fort. At its heart was an open quad, more a rectangle than a square, lined on all four sides by continuous single-storeyed barracks that faced the quad and turned ninety degrees at the corners. The security prisoners were lodged in a row of rooms on one of the larger sides. The rear windows of these rooms, looking out towards the stone wall, had been recently bricked up, but each room had lights, a fan and furniture. Also available, in the words of one of the prisoners, Pattabhi Sitaramayya, were "two bedsheets with C-class stripes in latitude and longitude, two woollen blankets bearing the stamp Y.C.P. (Yeravda Central Prison) and a mosquito curtain which might have been an heirloom of Shivaji's days".¹⁷⁰ NCOs of the Raj's Army lived in the rooms before the Fort was converted into a prison for the WorCom. Opposite the prisoners' rooms, and across the barren quad, were the Jailor's and warders'

quarters and space for stores. On a side row were the dining room, kitchen, bathing rooms and lavatory.

Four of the prisoners – Vallabhbhai, who was 67 and the oldest, Pattabhi, at 62 next in age to the Sardar, Azad, the President, who was 54, and the youngest of the Party, the 42-year-old Hare Krushna Mahtab of Orissa – had a room each to themselves, with Patel and the Maulana occupying the two end or corner rooms, the Sardar's being the one near the dining room. Jawaharlal, 53, who took the room next to Azad's, shared it for a while with Syed Mahmud, who was also 53. Shankarrao Deo of Maharashtra, 47, and Prafulla Chandra Ghosh of Bengal, 51, were together in a room. An orphan in his childhood, Deo had raised himself, studied law and the scriptures, faced the Raj's lathis and served Congress from 1919. Ghosh had been a professor of chemistry and an official at the Calcutta Mint. Kripalani, 54, G. B. Pant, 55, the 53-year-old U.P. socialist Narendra Dev, and Asaf Ali, 54 and a Delhi resident, were the remaining four.

Prasad, 61, was not with them because illness had prevented him from attending the Bombay meetings. He was arrested and detained in Bihar. C.R., 64, was not arrested because he had left Congress in July and kept out of Quit India. Also spared was Bhulabhai; he had resigned from the WorCom in July on grounds of health.

Vallabhbhai did not record his Ahmednagar life or refer to it after release. A picture of it can, however, be drawn from material in the diaries or recollections of five of his colleagues – Jawaharlal, Azad, Kripalani, Pattabhi and Mahtab –, in letters that Patel wrote, and in the files of the Raj. The world was shut out from the prisoners. Newspapers and letters were not allowed in. J. M. Sladen, the Home Secretary in Bombay, told Dahyabhai a few days after his father's arrest that the Government "cannot disclose where he had been taken or confined or who is confined with him". Five weeks later the Raj was still unwilling to let any Indian know where the WorCom were being confined.¹⁷¹

After a while Vallabhbhai and the rest were told that they would be allowed to write to approved relatives but the Sardar and several others refused to submit names for clearance. Ere long the Raj gave up its demand for advance notice of names but in the first eleven months of his detention Patel wrote only one letter and it was not to a relative. Manibehn and Dahyabhai were both in jail in any case.

The letter was addressed to Gandhi and written for about the saddest of reasons. Detained at Gandhi's side, Mahadev had died. The event had taken place on August 15, six days after the arrests, but Vallabhbhai only heard of it on August 28, when a newspaper, allowed in for the first time, referred to Mahadev's end. "The news of Mahadev's death," Pattabhi noted in his diary, "cast a gloom over us

in Ahmednagar Fort. I was moved to tears myself and Vallabhbhai was deeply shaken. He fasted for the night as he could not touch food."¹⁷² In his letter to the Mahatma, written a fortnight after he heard the bitter news and delivered by the Raj to the addressee, Patel said:

The word that Mahadev has gone just refuses to leave the mind. For Mahadev to slip away suddenly and quickly like this, leaving everybody behind, shows God's wrath.

What message of sympathy shall we send to you, who have been encouraging us to forget such suffering?

Yet I am unable to suppress the longing to send this tiny message of solace, for at no time have you faced a wound so sharp as this. We saw today, in a newspaper, your message to Durgabehn (Mahadev's wife) and could recognize your pain.¹⁷³

* * *

On the day of their arrival, Kripalani recalls, Azad, showing "towering rage", threw out the Jailor who had brought ready-to-drink tea for them in an aluminium kettle along with loaves of bread on an aluminium plate and glasses for the tea. The Congress President "ordered" the Jailor to bring tea in a pot, milk in a jug and sugar in a bowl, plus cups, saucers and spoons. The Jailor, an Indian, complied.¹⁷⁴ According to Pattabhi, he was "bravely performing his duties with visible regard for his new guests and with unshakeable loyalty to his old masters".¹⁷⁵

The Jailor was soon supported and supervised by Major Sendak, a 38-year-old English surgeon, "lean and lanky, soft in speech, sympathetic in tone but stern in duty," as Pattabhi described him.¹⁷⁶ His charges gathered that Sendak and his wife had escaped from the Andamans, where he was the Jail Superintendent, leaving behind their car, wedding gifts and furniture, when the Japanese arrived there. The capable Sendak played a twin role, monitoring the prisoners' thinking and also, by his care of their health, protecting the Raj against accusations of neglect.

With the arrival of Sendak, or Cheeta Khan, as the learned Azad named him, after the Abyssinian who was Chand Bibi's jailor when she was confined in her own Fort, things slowly improved. On the 28th of August the prisoners saw a newspaper for the first time after their arrest, even if it was only the British-owned *Times of India*. New mosquito nets arrived and, after a week of indifferent food, a decent cook was found. "An earlier nominee to this office," Pattabhi records, "was about to enter the enclosure when a close search of his person and habiliments frightened and disgusted him and he ran away."¹⁷⁷

Sendak did not spend his nights in the enclosure, or the Keep, as the Raj called it, but the Jailor and the warders did. If the Keep was sealed off, no messages could go to or from the prisoners. Since some comings and goings of jail staff were unavoidable, all except the Superintendent, the Jailor and the Subedar (or deputy jailor) were searched in a tent near the entrance of the Keep in the presence of a British intelligence official. A second check at the wall, during which jail employees were stripped "by or in the presence of British troops", was given up after the staff protested and the presidency's Inspector-General of prisons, Lt.-Col. M. G. Bhandari, backed the protest.¹⁷⁸

Vallabhbhai "chokes you with laughter by a play of his sharp and incisive wit",¹⁷⁹ Pattabhi noted, but the Andhra Congressman and historian was no Mahadev: he did not write down the sallies, which have gone with the wind. But a sample of his spiritedness while facing a representative of the Raj is available – an exchange between him and Major-General Candy, Surgeon-General of Bombay, who visited the Fort at the end of August 1942 to acquaint himself with the health of the prisoners. They had known each other: Candy was Ahmedabad's health officer when, 18 years earlier, Patel was municipal president.

Candy: *I am getting old and a little peevish.* Patel: *If you are old and peevish at 56, what should I be?* Candy: *How old are you?* 58? Patel: *Sixty-seven. And I am looking forward to another 33 years.*¹⁸⁰

The day following his arrest, Gandhi wrote the first of several letters he would write to the Raj from his detention camp. In this opening salvo, the Mahatma asked the Raj to transfer Vallabhbhai to his care. "This temporary jail," he said to Lumley, the Bombay Governor, "is commodious enough. I have great anxiety about the Sardar who never got over the intestinal collapse he had during his last incarceration."¹⁸¹ The proposal, of which Patel had no inkling, was rejected by the Raj.

At the end of September Vallabhbhai was allowed to receive a copy of *Reader's Digest* and another of *Time* that Dahyabhai, before his arrest, had requested the Bombay Government to forward. Two months later a rug, four kurtas and a pair of shawls, also sent by Dahyabhai, were delivered to Vallabhbhai after inspection for smuggled messages.¹⁸²

As the months passed, a few newspapers other than the *Times of India* were also admitted but not *Gujarat Samachar* or the *Hindustan Times*, the latter edited by Devadas Gandhi. Quenching, to some extent, the prisoners' thirst for contact with the outside world, the papers, though censored, one-sided and incomplete, were sought by everyone at once. For a while "it was all confusion" until a sequence was agreed upon: "Major gives the papers to Maulana. Thence they

travel to Sardar and Jawaharlal....Between 7.30 and 8 p.m. Mr Kripalani sees them. After 8.30 they go to Mahtab's room...." Shankarrao, Pattabhi, Ghosh, Narendra Dev, Pant and Syed Mahmud, in that order, read them the following day.¹⁸³

"Routine," Mahtab would afterwards recall, "was just as in a hostel. At 7 a.m. breakfast; lunch at 1 p.m.; bridge from 1 to 3 p.m.; then rest from 3 to 5 p.m.; then tea; 6 p.m. to 7 p.m. games; 7 to 8.30 p.m. dinner; coffee; and then we retired."¹⁸⁴ Not that all kept the same schedule. Pattabhi noted: "It is mainly in the afternoon, between lunch and evening tea, that serious work is done – writing."¹⁸⁵ Of the twelve at least six used their pens at Ahmednagar. Jawaharlal wrote his *Discovery of India*; Azad his *Ghubar-i-Khatir*; Mahtab a history of Orissa; Pattabhi his diary, later published as *Feathers and Stones*; Kripalani a book on Gandhi; and Narendra Dev reconstructed from its French version a lost Sanskrit work that was available only in Chinese and French*.

Patel did not write. He walked, read, raised flowers, spun and played bridge. All his walks, pre-dawn and evening, were within the confines of the Keep, brisk steps up and down a 200-foot path across the quad. He did, in Pattabhi's estimate, four miles a day, which comes to about 120,000 lengths during his enforced spell in the Keep.

"He was a voracious reader," Mahtab would recall. "He used to finish books after books. It was difficult to supply him books."¹⁸⁷ Kripalani too would remember that the Sardar "was reading all the time".¹⁸⁸ He devoured the newspapers and books that the Raj was willing to obtain or forward. Patel, Pattabhi wrote in his diary, "is extremely alert and equally anxious to inform himself. No detail is too insignificant for him, whether it be in understanding the war situation or interpreting the latest speech of Amery or the Viceroy."¹⁸⁹

B. P. Patel, ICS, who as Ahmednagar district's Collector paid weekly visits to the Keep in the first half of 1943, remembers Vallabhbhai's role in growing a morning glory creeper on a string trellis near the entrance to his room.¹⁹⁰ The creeper was quite the talk of the Keep. Pattabhi noted:

*In front of his verandah, the Sardar has grown the "heavenly blue" and from morning to evening the blue flowers interspersed with a few pinks present a beauty which is undoubtedly of heavenly glory. The whole creeper forms an arch at the limbs of which stand two big pots with fine roses. The Sardar is very proud of his achievement and incidentally described this as Shakuntala's bower.*¹⁹¹

* "After our release we learnt that the earlier Sanskrit text had been found in China. 60 per cent of Narendra Dev's translation was in accordance with the original, but his manuscript lost its importance." : Mahtab.¹⁸⁶

The party's star gardener, however, was Jawaharlal, to whom belongs the principal credit for turning what Kripalani called "a barren and dreary compound, without even a blade of grass"¹⁹² into a place that, in Azad's words, "started to bloom", giving "beauty and joy".¹⁹³ As Pattabhi put it, Jawaharlal was "sowing, digging, planting and pruning, watering and weeding...in the hot sun with his hat on and in pouring rain with his rain coat".¹⁹⁴ Yet Patel gave Jawahar valuable support in this endeavour, tending creepers and beds and enlisting help. "The Sardar sometimes used to engage me", Mahtab would recall, "in watering the trees here and there".¹⁹⁵ With a note of surprise, Jawaharlal wrote in his diary: "Vallabhbhai takes a great deal of interest in the garden and knows something about it."¹⁹⁶

Patel's labour on the charkha was more sporadic. The regular spinners were Kripalani, Pattabhi, Ghosh and Deo. The last-named knew by heart and daily repeated all the verses in the *Gita*. It was at bridge that the Sardar easily led the field. Mahtab thought him "a very brilliant bridge player" but would also remember him as one who got "very angry with his partner even if the game was lost owing to his mistake".¹⁹⁷ "I see that I have to play against three opponents", Patel would say.¹⁹⁸ Criticism of the partner was noticed on the badminton court as well. "For every failure," Mahtab would recollect, "Jawaharlal would blame his partner".¹⁹⁹ Pattabhi, too, recorded Vallabhbhai's "genuine seriousness" with cards, "which ill tolerates bad play", and added: "Kripalani pairs with the Sardar and gets comments and criticisms in abundance".²⁰⁰ On another occasion, when Patel and Mahtab played bridge against Pant and Ghosh, the Sardar "was angry", Pattabhi saw, at the minutes Pant took to make up his mind.²⁰¹ Of Patel's keenness, Mahtab says: "After lunch, at least for two hours, he must play bridge (and) not allow any of us to take rest. He would collect people from door to door."²⁰²

Bridge enabled Patel to kill time and forget the condition in which he and his colleagues were placed. Others achieved the same objectives by writing, a hobby that Vallabhbhai said he disdained. In part the aversion was genuine, for he saw that writing so easily became an escape, or a substitute for action. Yet his reluctance to write may have also been linked to his lack of a university experience in his youth. Such an experience might have given him the desire to write; not having had it may have affected Patel's self-confidence for writing. The liveliness of his speech, his fondness for detail, his interest in individuals, his candour and the sharp ear and memory that enabled him to come out, as Pattabhi found in the Keep, with "the apt citation of hundreds of proverbs in Gujarati"²⁰³ would in different circumstances have produced a fine and even a great author.

His contempt for the exercise of writing shows in the script, English or Gujarati, of his letters. Words rush out to fill a sheet. There is no

sign of reflection aimed at polish and the intention seems to be to complete the chore of putting pen to paper in the shortest possible time. Meaning is never sacrificed – not a sentence of his is ambiguous and there are few if any perhapses and on-the-other-hands – but certainly elegance is and at times spelling too. Thus he writes of “scratching his brains”, of being “incorrigible” and even of his “simpathy”.²⁰⁴ He shot off his letters and did not like to draft, craft or revise them. What he did was to give, promptly and clearly, his opinion, decision or instruction, as the case required. The occasions when his sentences were constructed with care or reflection were extremely rare.

Be that as it may, Mahtab thought that at Ahmednagar Patel “did not seem to have a scholarly bent of mind”,²⁰⁵ while Jawaharlal wrote in his diary that “it is difficult for (Vallabhbhai) to think internationally”.²⁰⁶ These observations should be read along with the assessment of Pattabhi, who wrote in October 1942 of the Sardar as one

*who inspires awe as well as reverence, who is rich in anecdote, flowing in sardonic wit and lacerating humour, seemingly wholly ignorant of the currents of thought in the world and yet fully conversant with their intimate details and courses, having in him embedded deep in his heart and brain numerous details which explain...the politics of the past one score and seven years.*²⁰⁷

* * *

Mahtab thought the war, and consequently their imprisonment, would last ten years,²⁰⁸ and Kripalani found the fact that there was “no period fixed” for their detention “most exhausting for the nerves”. He added:

*During all those days we saw no one near and dear to us. Nay, we saw no one from outside, friend or opponent. We saw no child or woman to break the monotony of our lives.*²⁰⁹

In a letter to his sister Krishna, Jawaharlal wrote:

We have sight of [the planets and stars] and they never lose their freshness. But of the men we see the range is limited and I fear we grow less and less fresh to each other. And women? It struck me as

* Pp. 298 and 303 above provide examples.

*an odd and arresting fact that for [a long time] I had not seen a woman even from a distance.*²¹⁰

So the routine went on. Vallabhbhai added the care of fruit for the company to his chores.²¹¹ Kripalani baked cakes. Asaf Ali gave lessons in Urdu to Pattabhi, Ghosh and Mahtab. Deo chanted his verses. Mahtab practised the flute. The Maulana taught history and Persian to those interested and, in the evening, umpired badminton games. While some swung or jerked their rackets, Patel walked. And thought.

On November 10, 1942 Churchill spoke at the annual banquet of London's Lord Mayor. The reaction in the Keep was not quite the same as at the banquet. A newspaper that reached the prisoners quoted Churchill:

I must say quite frankly that I hold it perfectly justifiable to deceive the enemy. (cheers)....

*Let me make this clear. Let there be no mistake about it in any quarter. I have not become the King's First Minister in order to preside over the liquidation of the British Empire.*²¹²

In December Sikander Hyat Khan of Punjab, who commanded the allegiance of many of his province's Muslims, died, an event that strengthened Jinnah. Though the twelve were together four times a day – for breakfast, lunch, tea and dinner –, they did not, as a group, discuss such happenings. Talking might bring their unhappiness, and also their differences, to the surface. Still, when January 26 arrived, "independence day" since 1930, the twelve, in Pattabhi's words, "met together for half-an-hour and remembered our nation and our Congress and our cause, in reverent gratefulness".²¹³ Azad, Vallabhbhai and Jawaharlal spoke.²¹⁴

A member of "Jawaharlal's group" would at times argue with someone belonging to "Sardar Patel's group", to use the description that Mahtab would give. According to him, while Pant "was in Patel's group", "Jawaharlal himself, Maulana and Asaf Ali were the members of Jawaharlal's group."²¹⁵ Mahtab's account is corroborated by the Raj's files. After nearly three years of detention, Asaf Ali told an intelligence official that he, Azad and Jawaharlal "had great differences with Gandhiji".²¹⁶ In Mahtab's recollection, "the discussions between Kripalani and Jawaharlal were very lively" and "Maulana used to flare up" when "Shankarrao Deo talked about Gandhian philosophy".²¹⁷

These accounts are also confirmed by Jawaharlal's diary and Azad's memoirs. Feeling, in January 1943, that "recent events have not justified Bapu's philosophy", Jawaharlal thought that Patel,

Kripalani and Deo were "suffering more" because "they had so stoutly adhered" to Gandhi's line.²¹⁸ In *India Wins Freedom*, Azad writes that he felt at Ahmednagar that his "reading of the situation had proved correct" and that "events showed that Gandhiji was wrong".²¹⁹ As Mahtab recalls:

*Maulana used to criticise Gandhi [and say], "His judgment was wrong and he forced his movement on all of us, but what was expected of him he did not do. We had thought that he would stake his life and go on an indefinite fast, but he hasn't done it."*²²⁰

Vallabhbhai's assessment was wholly different. He did not regret Quit India. But the matter was not discussed between him and Azad, or between him and Jawaharlal, until March 1945. As Patel would then say, he had "avoided speaking on the subject for 2 1/2 years" because he had guessed "what Maulana and others had felt" and wished to "avoid an argument".²²¹ Feeling, likewise, that "the subject is too delicate and our nerves might not be able to stand the strain," Jawaharlal also chose not to discuss it.²²²

Thus, though the goal of the twelve was the same, their hearts were not one. "Relations were very cordial," Mahtab would afterwards say.²²³ "No doubt we here are men of different temperaments," Vallabhbhai would write in May 1945 to his daughter, "but we manage to get along."²²⁴ While this was true on the surface, there was also an undercurrent of mutual blame and resentment.²²⁵ However, the twelve were mature and discreet men, each of whom knew how he wanted to spend his day, and all had a common foe. They were able to avoid a rupture. Equally, and this was less fortunate, there was no joint thinking or planning for the future. In Mahtab's words, "though all the important leaders of India were in jail together [for almost three years], they never thought of the programme, the plan or the constitution" of a free India.²²⁶ Their spirits still angry at Britain, the twelve did not realize that freedom was near, or that it would bring its own needs.

On February 11, Patel, Azad and the rest heard the news they had waited for.²²⁷ Gandhi had begun a fast. Commenced on February 10, it would end on March 3. Gandhi had told the Viceroy that his wish was not to die but to combat injustice. Government propaganda, circulated in India and abroad, especially America, had accused him of desiring if not plotting the violence that had occurred. It had also insinuated that he was pro-Japanese. When the Mahatma's demand for proof or clearance was turned down, he had said he would go on a 21-day fast.

At one point it looked as if the ordeal might claim his life, and three of Linlithgow's councillors, Homi Mody, M. S. Aney and N. R. Sircar,

resigned when their plea for his release was rejected. Thrown on the defensive, the Raj worried, but Linlithgow and London decided to sit out the fast. Rumours, later confirmed, that the Raj was ready for a cremation on the grounds of the Aga Khan's house reached the Keep at Ahmednagar.²²⁸ But Gandhi did not die. Patel's relief was doubtless shared by Linlithgow but not necessarily by Churchill. A sharp reminder of India's discontent, the fast had disturbed the Raj's poise. But British control over an unreconciled India was intact.

"I haven't spent a day or even a moment in despair or remorse," Vallabhbhai would claim in a letter to Manibehn written 31 months after his arrest. "True," he admitted, "the mind is troubled to hear of the sorrows of those outside, and news of the death of colleagues shakes one a little." But he and his friends were experiencing the "fullest peace" because they had done and were doing "their duty".²²⁹ He was not hospitable to despair but it must have assailed him, as it assailed Pattabhi. When word reached Ahmednagar of the death in March 1943 of Satyamurti, who had been arrested the previous August, Pattabhi wrote in his diary: "He passed away with unfulfilled ambitions and unrealized ideal, as most of [us] are perhaps destined to do."²³⁰ "We have counted the ninth of the month nine times," Pattabhi noted on 9th April 1943. The day brought the news that Azad's wife had died.

About six weeks later Vallabhbhai collapsed after a meal of marrow soup and was in agony after being revived. His spastic colon had flared up again. "Vallabhbhai causes anxiety," Jawaharlal wrote in his diary.²³¹ Azad asked him to send for Dahyabhai and Manibehn but this would have meant a request to the Raj, and Patel rejected the idea without the slightest hesitation.²³² Though the pain lasted several days – visiting the Keep, B. P. Patel, the Collector, noted Vallabhbhai's "fortitude" against pain and his refusal to be helped to rise or move to the bathroom²³³ –, he was not in danger. After initial resistance he agreed to being x-rayed by the Raj's doctors, his plea for examination by doctors of his choice having been rejected. A Lt.-Col. Black and Major Sendak concluded that there was no malignant growth. The colon did not leave Vallabhbhai alone; there was an attack every three months but the Sardar had learned to live with it. On July 1 he wrote to his daughter-in-law:

I did not write [about the illness] because I did not want you to worry about me without being able to do a thing about it.

*The body will last as long as God wants. If the summons comes, I am all prepared. Who is able to say whether or not his work is done? I am virtually 68 and have done what I was capable of doing. Can there be anything better for me than to find release while doing what I have accepted as my dharma?*²³⁴

He struck the same note in a letter in September 1943 to Manibehn, who was in Yeravda Jail:

*Don't be thinking about when you will meet me, or whether you will see me again at all....When a leaf ripens, it falls. I will go the same way. You are not to be dejected even a little by my going. Not that it is about to happen....*²³⁵

As often before, Mridula was Manibehn's jailmate. Vallabhbhai referred to her in his letter:

*It was good that [the Sarabhais] saw Mridu. This had never happened before – Bhai (Ambalal) and Sarlabehn having to wait a year to see their daughter.*²³⁶

By now Patel was willing to write the "permitted" letters. The Government passed the letters on after censorship, which could only be exercised after the Raj's translators had put them into English. The time-consuming procedure also applied to letters received by the prisoners.

To Dahyabhai, 27.8.43: *Imprisonment gives you an excellent opportunity to develop your interior sight. The solitude of jail encourages a change in one's nature that cannot take place outside.*

In these hard times people outside are enduring sadness without limit. It is God's kindness to us that we have been spared that kind of suffering.

To Manibehn, 27.10.43: *About 20 lines have been blacked out in your letter. Today is the last day of this (Indian) year....We have to pray that He will lighten the world's load in the coming year and give a glimpse of peace.*

To Dahyabhai, 12.11.43: *I do not like this compulsion to write in English. It is better to get rid of the wish that letters reach early. In any case, half of your letter was scored out. Don't worry about me, and don't ask the Government about my health.*²³⁷

In November 1943, responding to a remark by Jawaharlal, Azad proposed an initiative: a message from the WorCom to the Viceroy that would cite the menace from Japan and the reports they had heard of a devastating famine in Bengal and offer suspension of disobedience. Nehru seemed open to the idea and mentioned it to Vallabhbhai who, according to Jawaharlal's diary, "did not at all like Maulana's proposal". It was "full of danger", Patel said. "I agreed," Jawaharlal noted. Later, in Pant's room, Vallabhbhai told Nehru, Azad and some others: "I sense dangers. Let us not act in a hurry.

Bapu is bound to take some step. He can't remain passive and silent. We should wait." In his diary, Jawaharlal noted:

I spoke for an absurdly long time. V. followed me briefly, then continued the next day. Strong, pointed, clear and not too long. He has got a lucid mind, though it may not be deep. He holds to certain anchors and has strong practical sense. He opposed Maulana's proposal.

"I am sure Gandhi would approve," Azad claimed, but Ghosh and Deo came down strongly on his suggestion. While Shankarrao asked the Maulana "to uproot the idea from his mind", Ghosh, the scientist, affirmed: "I would rather take potassium cyanide and advise all of you to do the same rather than agree to any such humiliating course of action."²³⁸

These "talks" were spread over five days and left "everyone hard and stiff and strained." Azad was "upset" by the remarks of Deo and Ghosh but was himself, in Nehru's phrase, "bullying". Jawaharlal found Patel "quiet but obviously angry", and he also saw "a flash of irritation from Vallabhbhai and Kripalani against me for my 'superiority complex' and supposed suggestion that others knew nothing of world affairs".²³⁹

This episode, bringing out a Patel who knew his mind and a Nehru who did not, was followed by another suggestion for an initiative, this time from Pant. The former U.P. Premier proposed a message from the WorCom to the Viceroy, or to the people of India via the Viceroy, expressing concern at the invasion of Assam by Japan that seemed imminent. Once more Jawaharlal was ready to support a move to break the ice but it was dropped after Vallabhbhai, this time surprisingly backed by Azad, opposed it.²⁴⁰

Ill for months at her husband's side in the Poona detention camp, Kasturba died there in February 1944, her head on Gandhi's lap. She had won imprisonment by defying a ban on a meeting and the Raj had sent her to the Aga Khan's house. She had been very fond of Patel, and he of her; Manibehn had cared for her and gone to prison with her. Her suffering featured in Vallabhbhai's letters and, we may assume, in his thoughts.²⁴¹

Six weeks after Kasturba's death, men who looked like army engineers checked and measured some of the rooms in the Keep. Patel was convinced that the Raj was moving Gandhi into their midst. That hope was belied but on May 6, 1944 the Mahatma was suddenly released. He had been seriously ill with malaria and dysentery and the Raj did not want to take any chances.

Gandhi sought recovery on the Juhu sands, in Sevagram and in the hill air of Panchgani. Eight weeks after his release Churchill sent

Wavell, who had replaced Linlithgow as Viceroy, a "peevisish telegram to ask why Gandhi hadn't died yet".²⁴² Churchill's disappointment was Patel's delight. As Vallabhbhai had guessed, Gandhi was seeking a way out for a Congress pinned down by the Raj and by its own resolutions.

In July, after conferring with C.R. in Panchgani, the Mahatma made two moves. One was towards the Raj. He was prepared, he told Wavell in a letter, to advise the WorCom that disobedience could no longer be offered and that Congress should cooperate fully with the war effort if a national government responsible to the Central Assembly was formed. There is no record of Patel's reaction to this offer, which was along the lines of Azad's proposal. Compromising with Quit India was distasteful but also, Vallabhbhai knew, unavoidable. He had objected to Azad's proposal only because he did not want the WorCom to yield to the Raj behind Gandhi's back.

The Raj spurned the offer of the Mahatma, whose second move was towards Jinnah. In his search for a settlement with the League, Gandhi went 14 times, in September, to Jinnah's house in Bombay. Patel disliked the exercise. So did Azad and Jawaharlal. Virtually the only one in the Keep who was positive about it was Asaf Ali.²⁴³ What Gandhi proposed, and Jinnah rejected, was a formula that C.R. was advocating. It said that Congress and the League should jointly demand a national government on the understanding that "contiguous Muslim-majority areas" could secede following independence, if separation was the preference of their adult populations.

The Mahatma was conceding a Pakistan through the Rajaji formula, but Jinnah did not find it large enough – it excluded the Hindu-majority districts of Bengal and Punjab –, or sovereign enough, for Gandhi wanted "bonds of alliance between Hindustan and Pakistan" written into any treaty of separation. Moreover, whereas Gandhi saw a separate state being formed "after India is free", Jinnah wanted partition under British auspices and before independence. He did not trust a Congress-ruled India to implement the promise of Pakistan.²⁴⁴

Vallabhbhai did not tell Azad and Jawaharlal that he agreed with their view of the Gandhi-Jinnah talks. "When I read the report that Gandhiji was going to Bombay to meet Mr Jinnah", Azad would afterwards recall, "I told my colleagues that Gandhiji was making a great mistake."²⁴⁵ Azad must have passed on this verdict in 1944 to Jawaharlal, Syed Mahmud and Asaf, and Patel may have said something similar to his group, but there is no record of the twelve discussing the Gandhi-Jinnah talks. However, of Vallabhbhai's attitude there is no doubt. Almost the first words he uttered on release

were those of complaint about Rajaji and his formula.²⁴⁶ Shortly thereafter, C.R. was, it would seem, “properly told off by the WorCom for having instigated Gandhi to the discussion with Jinnah”.²⁴⁷ It is probable that the “instigation” for the admonition to C.R. came from Patel.

To return to the Keep, Syed Mahmud was unexpectedly and unconditionally released on October 5. Since he had been keeping poorly, Jawaharlal – who had been Mahmud’s roommate – and Patel concluded that the Raj had acted out of consideration for Mahmud’s health. The truth came out some days later when the newspapers published a letter that Mahmud had written to the Viceroy dissociating himself from Quit India.²⁴⁸ Vallabhbhai conveyed his shock and sense of betrayal in a letter to Dahyabhai:

*To think that he was in the same room (with Nehru) for such a long time! He did not trust his colleagues and concealed all his doings from them! What a shame! If God had given death instead, his life would have retained a pleasant odour.*²⁴⁹

Patel, meanwhile, had probably done something himself in secret: he somehow obtained a complete copy of the spirited correspondence that Gandhi had carried on with the Raj from prison. “A full cyclostyled copy has reached Vallabhbhai,” Jawaharlal noted in his diary, “but I have not read it so far.”²⁵⁰ Jawaharlal had his secret too. In November 1944 the Viceroy sent him a book of poems with a request to keep the gesture private “in view of our respective positions”. After some cogitation, Nehru informed Azad but not Patel. He thought that Vallabhbhai “would not appreciate the motive underlying Wavell’s letter and would draw unwarranted conclusions”.²⁵¹ Earlier, a rumour had reached the Keep “that Wavell has got an intense prejudice against Vallabhbhai whom he considers pro-Japanese”. Hearing of the rumour, Jawaharlal wrote in his diary:

*That (the rumour) may be true, but it is absurd to consider Vallabhbhai as pro-Japanese. He and most of us and most Indians are intensely anti-British and this feeling has grown during the past 16 months. Also it is difficult for him to think internationally. In this he represents our people far more than I do.*²⁵²

“Thinking internationally” can mean thinking for the world, and not just your own country; it can also mean understanding international forces and taking them into account in your appraisal of the national scene. No doubt Nehru cared for other lands. As Gandhi once wrote to Linlithgow, Jawaharlal, “because of his personal contacts”, felt “much more the impending ruin of China and Russia than I can”,²⁵³ and we may concede that Nehru felt

it more than Patel did. Yet Vallabhbhai's heart was as pained as Nehru's by the slaughter of the war and by the cruelties of Nazi Germany, Fascist Italy and militarist Japan. His letters to Manibehn and Dahyabhai from Ahmednagar speak almost invariably of his sorrow, sympathy and prayer in this regard: his struggle against the British had not made him inhuman.

Nor would it be factually correct to contend that while Nehru was willing to subordinate India's struggle to the wider clash between totalitarianism and democracy, Patel was not. In fact, during the first two years of the war, Vallabhbhai was more sympathetic than Nehru to the Allies. Nehru's was a much more anti-British line, in this period, than Patel's or Gandhi's. Though Germany's attack on Russia in the summer of 1941 modified Nehru's stance, he continued to feel that "no compromise was possible between nationalism and imperialism".²⁵⁴ and in January 1942 – even after Pearl Harbour, that is — he criticized as a "primrose path" C.R.'s approach for a settlement with Britain. Nehru's sentiment against Nazism and Fascism was undeniable, but his attitudes were fashioned less by the war's principal events than by personal contacts. The visits to India of Generalissimo and Madame Chiang and of Cripps influenced Nehru more than Pearl Harbour or the Japanese sweep.²⁵⁵

The truth is that: their differences notwithstanding, Patel, Nehru and Azad and Gandhi too, were all nationalists. None of them was prepared to postpone India's struggle until the global struggle was resolved. None of them, in this sense, was ready to "think internationally". For all his dislike of the supposedly pro-Japanese look of Gandhi's April 1942 draft, Jawaharlal had no difficulty, in the end, in proposing Quit India, a programme that was bound to embarrass the Allies.

As for the ability to include international factors in national strategies, Vallabhbhai, as time would show, probably possessed it in a greater measure than Nehru. There is no doubt that Jawaharlal had more foreign contacts than Patel; he had experienced the world more than Vallabhbhai; and the world featured more in his conversation. All this may be readily granted, yet it has not been shown that Patel's grasp of world affairs was inferior to Jawaharlal's.

Earlier we noted Jawaharlal's judgment on Vallabhbhai's mind: "lucid but may not be deep". No wonder Vallabhbhai and Kripalani sensed a "superiority complex" or snobbery in their colleague. The Sardar's mind was not nearly as versatile as Jawaharlal's. It was incurious about poetry, art, music and theatre, fields where Nehru's mind enthusiastically roamed. But it was sharp as a razor and seasoned by a lifetime's interest in people. Weighing the men in Ahmednagar, Pattabhi called Patel "the most wise"²⁵⁶ Over long decades, as Vallabhbhai watched people and listened to them, paced

and thought, waters of insight had poured into his mind. The store they made was not shallow.

Wavell was not the only person to give Jawaharlal a book. Patel presented him, in September, with a copy of the Gujarati edition of Nehru's *Letters to a Daughter*. Navajivan had sent it for Vallabhbhai, the Raj had passed it, and the Sardar passed it on.²⁵⁷

After fifteen months of detention during which he experienced Bombay's Arthur Road prison and the jails of Yeravda and Nasik, Dahyabhai was set free in March 1944. Manibehn too was released – only to be rearrested six weeks later in Bardoli and sent to Surat jail, notorious for its filth and mosquitoes. Vallabhbhai agonized when he heard that his Mani had been sent there. Yet there was little he could do except urge his daughter "to find joy in what comes when it comes".²⁵⁸ Describing Manibehn's misfortune in a letter to Dahyabhai, he added:

*She is afraid to speak openly to you and fears that you will be sharp with her....Forsaking all the pleasures and enjoyments of this world and wearing only white khadi, she has never even put on a coloured dress! Rare is a woman as austere as her....There is no prejudice of any kind in her mind against Bhanumati. The two of them will learn to love each other.*²⁵⁹

After a trying spell in Surat, Manibehn was sent to Yeravda again. When her release from the second term was only ten weeks away, and his own freedom nowhere on the horizon, Vallabhbhai was hit by a consciousness of her need to find a role independent of him. He penned a letter that must have saddened and pained his daughter:

To Manibehn, 13.12.44: The thought keeps coming to me that my time in this world is nearing its end. How long can you stay with me? Thinking of the future, shouldn't you settle down in a field of your choice so that you have no sudden difficulties to face when I am gone?

*You will be going of course to Wardha for a while but you can't be doing that for ever. Who can say how long Bapu will be able to live?*²⁶⁰

The prisoners were told in October 1944, 26 months after their arrest, that relatives would soon be given permission to visit them. The "great favour", as Patel termed it, was rejected by everyone in the Keep. Dahyabhai was instructed not to apply for permission.²⁶¹

Another 26th of January arrived. The Keep's inmates, eleven now, assembled solemnly once more. Azad spoke: he was the President. So did Vallabhbhai: it was duty. Jawaharlal was asked to but did not. "I had nothing to say," he would enter in his diary.²⁶² In April, an intelligence officer of the Raj spent an hour in the quad and recorded that Patel was "walking faster than a man in normal health".²⁶³

Rumours that they were soon to be dispersed among several prisons precipitated the only joint review of Quit India that took place at Ahmednagar. In sessions spread over four or five afternoons in the third week of March, they went into the past. Initiated by Azad, the exercise was a disaster. Azad, who began, said that Quit India had failed and was an error. In Azad's view, "if there was to be violence, we ought to have taken to it in a more disciplined and organised way."²⁶⁴ The British were still there. The WorCom was walled in. And Jinnah had spread himself: the League had formed ministries in Sind and Assam in 1942 and a year later in Bengal and the NWFP.* Jawaharlal, who followed Azad, seemed to agree with him and yet not agree either. According to his diary, he said:

Bapu's attitude during those months (before August 1942) was wrong and confusing, but he was representing the mind of thinking and unthinking India....

*I am not very sorry for what I did or for what happened. I do think it could have been done better if the approach had been different, if, in fact, our approach of August had been consistently followed in previous months. Though much harm resulted, much good also is visible....Only the future would show.*²⁶⁶

Recalling the WorCom's April 1942 session in Allahabad, Jawaharlal touched on the draft resolution that Gandhi had sent and the reluctance of several of his colleagues to countenance changes in it. Then, addressing Azad, he said, "by exerting undue pressure you salvaged the position a little." "What else could I have done?" interjected Azad.

We saw at the time that the pressure which in Nehru's view had salvaged the situation had hurt Vallabhbhai. As far as he was concerned, the exercise had unfairly extorted Prasad's submission and left him (Patel) helpless. Jawaharlal's praise of the exercise and Azad's defence of it rubbed a wound that had not healed in the three years that had passed. According to Jawaharlal, Vallabhbhai spoke in a "tone full of suppressed anger, pain and bitterness".

* It was probably to such remarks from Azad that Kripalani was referring when at the end of 1946 he recalled how "in those dark days many a false prophet taunted. 'Did we not say so?'" ²⁶⁵

He wished to say with all emphasis that he did not agree with Maulana's analysis and he was firmly convinced that the attitude and steps taken by Bapu had been correct and inevitable. Any other course would have meant the gradual annihilation of the Congress....

In particular, he said, he resented what I had said about the events in Allahabad....He resented this attempt to show that he and his colleagues had not only been wrong but also that what they proposed then was dangerous for the country. They had put up with much they did not like, they had swallowed many a bitter pill, and now to be referred to and run down in this way was most objectionable.²⁶⁷

Why had the three-year-old wound not healed? And why had it reopened so quickly? The allegation that he had proposed something "dangerous for the country" is undoubtedly part of the explanation. However, another reason for Patel's reaction was the fact that Quit India and its consequences had led him to make an important, and as yet private, decision. Quit India had not been an unmixed blessing. If Congress was preserved by it, Jinnah had been strengthened: the Raj had let its sunshine fall on the League. The incidents of violence had disturbed the Raj but also, in some important circles, discredited Congress. Hampering the Allies was not Quit India's aim but it was the effect. And it was the WorCom rather than the Raj that had come to a standstill. Self-righteous as Azad's and Jawahar's criticism was, it touched a considerable unease in Vallabhbhai's system.

This unease did not alter his net assessment; he would maintain until the end that Quit India was "correct and inevitable" and that he had but done his duty. But he stored, in a suppressed layer of his soul, several thoughts of blame: of Azad for his opposition, Jawaharlal for his hesitation, Jinnah for his obstruction, Rajaji for his secession, Gandhi for his lack of preparation of Quit India, Churchill for his cussedness, Hitler for disrupting the Congress-Raj partnership, Tojo and the Japanese sweep for confusing Congressmen, and the people of India for not, at one stroke, withdrawing from the Raj....

He did not regret Quit India or his confinement and was not being dishonest while claiming to Manibehn that he was at peace in the Keep; yet a significant thought had taken shape in his mind. *Next time he would think twice before going by Gandhi's instinct.* The path it opened up was often too long, too painful, too idealistic. Even if finally proved wise, the instinct caused too many upheavals in the short run. He would be ready in the future to take a less hard and more practical path, if one was apparent, even if the Mahatma prescribed another route – ready, in other words, to go

back on the “never again” oath he had made when his brief “secession” of July 1940 ended. He was not going to say this, of course, to Jawaharlal or Azad or even to Kripalani. Until events disclosed his independence, it would remain his secret. But it made him prickly during the Keep’s review of Quit India. Inwardly prepared to disobey Gandhi in the future,²⁶⁸ Vallabhbhai was inevitably touchy while defending the Mahatma over Quit India. And though he kept his decision to himself, a rumour of a change in his views filtered out of the Keep.

Interestingly enough, Jawaharlal would justify Quit India in 1956 in language that Patel had used during the Ahmednagar review. “I don’t think that the action we took in 1942 could have been avoided or ought to have been avoided,” Nehru would say. “If we had been passive then, I think we would have lost all our strength.”²⁶⁹

We must return, however, to the Keep’s events. Azad and Jawahar tried to explain their remarks and said that they had not wished to give offence. According to Jawaharlal, whose version is the only one we have, “the response was wholly lacking”.

Questions and answers became more heated – these were between Vallabhbhai and Kripalani on the one hand and Maulana and me on the other. Maulana kept cool. Not I or Vallabhbhai or Kripalani.

Jawaharlal walked out, saying that he had no wish to talk further with persons who were liable to “distort and misunderstand...every word uttered”. Next day Jawaharlal apologized for “having lost my temper” and the “review” continued for two more afternoons but no agreed conclusions emerged.²⁷⁰

* * *

Bhulabhai Desai, Congress’s leader in the Central Assembly, busied himself from November 1944 in a bid for a Congress-League government at the centre. Newspaper reports that he was meeting Wavell and the Mahatma troubled Patel, who had not forgotten that Bhulabhai had left the WorCom in June 1942 and kept away from Quit India. Jawaharlal was speaking for Vallabhbhai too when he wrote in his diary:

*We have all been rather upset by Bhulabhai’s repeated visits to the Viceroy. Apparently he is hatching some scheme, some proposal for a settlement. Anything coming from Bhulabhai – anything of this type – is suspect.*²⁷¹

Desai held talks with his friend Liaqat Ali Khan, deputy leader of the League group in the Central Assembly. Gandhi had authorized this move, while also asking Bhulabhai to "make sure" that any agreement he managed to reach with Liaqat had "Jinnah's previous approval".²⁷² On January 11, 1945, Desai and Liaqat initialled a pact; Desai informed Wavell and Gandhi; and the Viceroy informed HMG that the plan "afforded an excellent opportunity of making progress in the political sphere".²⁷³ The terms of the pact, which was not made public, were that – notwithstanding the disagreement over Pakistan – five from Congress, five from the League and two representing other groups should form an interim government which would release the WorCom as its first act.

In three days, and with good reason, Gandhi asked for a modification of the pact. Jinnah and Liaqat had attacked Congress and a report had been published that the Mahatma "desired the formation of a coalition government over the head of the Working Committee".²⁷⁴ Gandhi now sought the WorCom's release along with the interim government's formation rather than as the new government's first act.

*Gandhi to Desai, 14.1.45: I am startled by what has appeared in the Press....What is all this? You will please see to it that nothing is done without permission of the Working Committee....I can understand all the things being done simultaneously. But you should make it clear that we cannot take a single step without the Working Committee.*²⁷⁵

If Gandhi was startled, Patel and his colleagues in the Keep seethed, as Pattabhi would afterwards write, at the possibility of "a settlement behind the purdah without the knowledge or the consent of the Working Committee".²⁷⁶ Released on health grounds in the third week of January, Prafulla Ghosh went straight to Wardha and conveyed Vallabhbhai's feelings to Gandhi.²⁷⁷

The WorCom's fears were redundant. Before the month was over Liaqat made a public speech denying the existence of a pact. "How can there be a settlement with him?" Gandhi asked Desai.²⁷⁸ In February Jinnah "disclaimed all knowledge of Liaqat's talks with Desai"²⁷⁹ and finally, on March 26, 1946, Liaqat said in the Central Assembly that his alleged pact with Desai was "a cock-and-bull story". Privately Liaqat told Bhulabhai that "he was obliged to deny the pact for political reasons" and Desai, who possessed a copy of the pact with Liaqat's signed initials, refrained from contradicting the repudiation.²⁸⁰

Wavell thought that Jinnah's statement was an "obvious falsehood".²⁸¹ Though the Desai-Liaqat pact gave the League parity

with a bigger body, Jinnah disowned it because it did not bar Congress from including a Muslim on its list. Crumpling the pact and throwing it away, Jinnah nonetheless pocketed parity as a given for future negotiations.*

It was not until April that the WorCom learned that the still-born pact had conceded Congress-League parity.²⁸² From his future utterances on the subject we may assume that Patel reacted violently against the concession, just as we can assume that he was dismayed by Bhulabhai's obvious gullibility. A brilliant advocate but not a circumspect negotiator, Desai ignored clear signs and warnings. On March 10, well after Jinnah's disclaimer, Wavell wrote in his diary, "I am told that Desai has been offering portfolios to his friends."²⁸³ Though unaware that Bhulabhai was acting in this fashion, Vallabhbhai and the WorCom felt that Desai was less keen on their release than on the formation of a new government.²⁸⁴ For this impression, and for his maladroitness, Bhulabhai paid, as we shall see, a bitter price. As for Liaqat, he was obliged in the end to admit the pact, though he claimed that he acted throughout in a personal capacity and not on behalf of Jinnah or the League.**²⁸⁵

The dispersal of the ten who remained in Ahmednagar commenced at the end of March. Each was sent to a civil jail in his own province. Patel and Deo were transferred, in mid-April, to Yeravda, shortly after word had reached the Keep of Roosevelt's death:

To Manibehn, 14.4.45: *Yesterday we had news of President Roosevelt's death. Much was expected of him in the future. In today's selfish world he stood out as a strong man interested to some extent in the world's welfare....No one knows what God wants and where He wants to take this world.*²⁸⁷

The war in Europe ended a month later.

To Dahyabhai, 11.5.45: *A fearsome chapter in Europe ends. Those who wanted to conquer the whole world are merged with the dust. Now another chapter will start...If the victors are self-seeking and intoxicated with success, they will have the same fate as the losers of today.*²⁸⁸

* Whether by accident or design, Wavell's council at the time had an equal number of Hindus and Muslims.

** The Pakistani writer Sharif Al Mujahid has suggested that Liaqat, believing that Jinnah was ill and dying, sought a "clandestine understanding" with Congress but resiled when Jinnah recovered.²⁸⁶

In May Manibehn, about to join the Mahatma in Mahabaleshwar, asked Vallabhbhai about the report that his thinking had altered. The father's denial contained a loop-hole.

To Manibehn, 22.5.45: *Don't believe stories that proceed from mouth to mouth about my views. Sitting in jail it is not possible, in any case, to form clear opinions about events outside. People will spread tales that suit them.*

Are my views going to change at this age? The implementation of Bapu's ideas depends on one's strength. But my experience of a lifetime tells me that he seldom goes wrong.

*Tell him not to worry in the slightest about those who are inside...*²⁸⁹

Defying all odds, Vallabhbhai had summoned sufficient strength to implement Gandhi's 1942 ideas. But he wasn't sure about the future. To his daughter, however, he again wrote reassuringly:

To Manibehn, 2.6.45: *Don't worry in the least bit about me. My weight, strength etc. are as they were. The mind is very peaceful. I abide with trust in God, and there is not a trace of anxiety. Once more I am relaxing under that sacred tree. Only I can't free my mind of thoughts of Mahadev. He appears in dreams too.*²⁹⁰

He was released on the morning of June 15, 1945.

SEVEN
1945-47
“VICTORY”



IT was Wavell's doing. Satisfied that to "hold India down by force" was impossible in the long run, he had sought Churchill's permission for releasing the WorCom and holding talks with representative Indians. "You must have mercy on us," Churchill told Wavell when the latter turned up in London to espouse his proposals. After "a long jeremiad about India which lasted for about 40 minutes", Churchill talked of dividing India "into Pakistan, Hindustan and Princestan" and said that in any case India was not his priority.¹ Wavell contended that neither the British voter nor the British soldier would, in peacetime, back a policy of repression in India. After making the Viceroy wait in London for weeks, Churchill yielded. Returning to India, Wavell announced over the radio that the WorCom would be let out and Indian leaders invited to Simla for talks.

Vallabhbhai and Deo emerged from the Yeravda gates at 7.30 a.m. on June 15. Clad in "spotless khaddar", Patel allayed an important anxiety by at once telling those who met him at the gates that his "health was as sound as it could be".² He was taken to the Poona home of N. V. Gadgil, president of the Maharashtra PCC, where the Sardar's message to assembled friends was, "Be ready. Self-government is round the corner."³ After an hour or so Vallabhbhai drove up to Panchgani to join Gandhi and also Manibehn. The reunion was wordless from the Mahatma's side – it was his day of silence. But he scribbled a note of joy and welcome. Its essence was that Patel should resume his hip-baths, eat only "milk, glucose, honey and, if you can digest it, butter" and cut out "any food with fibres"!⁴ Of the reunion after three years of father and daughter we have no record. Did feet hasten, as the moment neared, and the heart thump? Did arms stretch out and enfold, and fingers quiver? The occasion was too personal for Manibehn's diary.

Four days later Vallabhbhai and the Mahatma descended the hill, motored to the Aga Khan's house and stood silently beside the two spots, separated by four feet, where Kasturba and Mahadev had been cremated after their deaths in detention. Patel knew what the two had

meant to Gandhi, who was aware of what they had meant to Vallabhbhai. Each sorrowed for the other and for himself.⁵ Kripalani joined the two in Poona and accompanied them on a train to Bombay. Shouting "*Mahatma Gandhi ki jai*" and "*Vallabhbhai Patel ki jai*," a large crowd welcomed the train at VT. "As soon as the jail gates were opened," Kripalani would write, "we saw a new and surging life."⁶ To him and the Sardar it was proof of Indians' pride in the '42 revolt. Their appraisal had been right, Azad's and Nehru's wrong. On June 27 joy, anger, justification and confidence poured out of Vallabhbhai when, after a three-year interval, he opened his lips before the public. His words included a reference to an old and unforgotten blow to his pride, the remark that not a dog had barked in India when Gandhi was arrested in 1922:

I thought I was bidding goodbye for ever to Bombay on the train (on August 9, 1942). My health was shattered and I told Mahatma Gandhi and Mahadev Desai that I did not hope to see them again.

The former Viceroy should be impeached. He did not put us on trial. Now he has already gone home.... The Bengal famine will not be forgotten.

This time the dogs did bark and did a lot of biting too. The next struggle will witness the biting of rabid dogs. The Viceroy was responsible for those outbursts. His policy goaded them.

The cause of Indian independence would have been lost for ever if the August 8 resolution had not been adopted.... Independence is approaching like the roaring flood.⁷

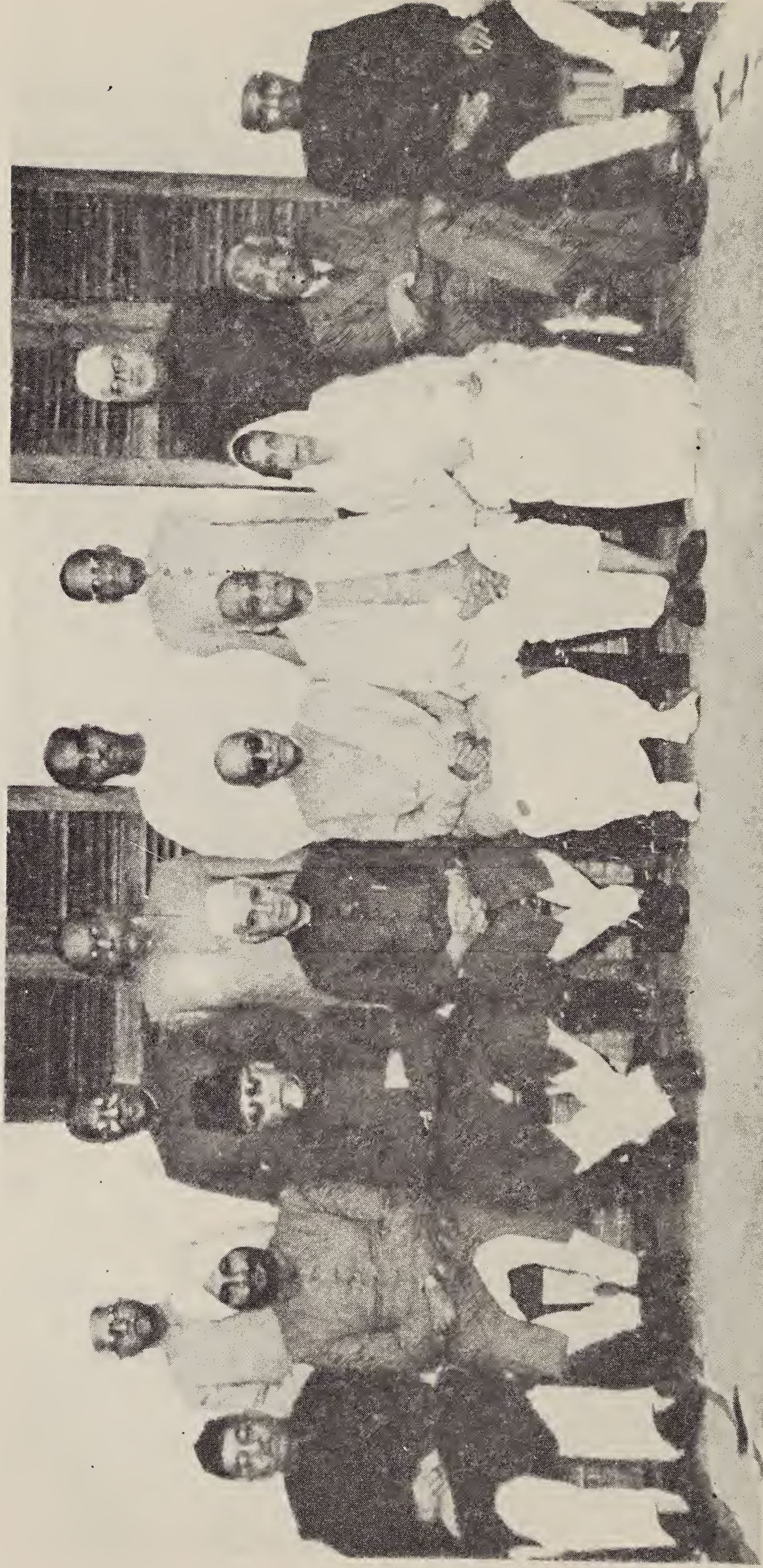
At another Bombay meeting three days later Patel came out with an expression that reflected the mood of the time. "Not a word of the Quit India resolution could be obliterated or altered," he said. "Indeed, if anything is to come next, it will be Quit Asia."⁸ The phrase caught on and Sarat Bose commented: "The Sardar has always been a man of action. He has never been a coiner of phrases. True, he coined one phrase and that was Quit Asia."⁹

At the end of June the WorCom made the long journey to the northern hill town. The Mahatma went with them. Joyous crowds thronged the stations en route. Jinnah and Liaqat were also invited to Simla, as were several provincial Premiers and ex-Premiers and Bhulabhai Desai. Wavell offered a representative Executive Council composed of an equal number of caste Hindus and Muslims, plus a Hindu Scheduled Caste member and possibly a few belonging to other minorities. Congressmen were urged not to harbour undue fears regarding the Viceroy's veto.

Putting aside its dislike both of parity and of the Viceroy's veto, Congress accepted the Simla proposals. Jinnah rejected them. In



In Kashmir, November 1947, with Bakshi Ghulam Mohammed (standing), Skeikh Abdullah and Manibehn



Free India's Cabinet with C. Rajagopalachari, the first Indian Governor-General. From left, standing, N. V. Gadgil, K. C. Neogy, B. R. Ambedkar, S. P. Mookerjee, N. G. Ayyangar, Jairamdas Doulatram; seated R. A. Kidwai, Baldev Singh, A. K. Azad, Nehru, C. R., Patel, Amrit Kaur, John Matthai and Jagjivan Ram



Nizam Usman Ali Khan of Hyderabad with Patel in February 1949



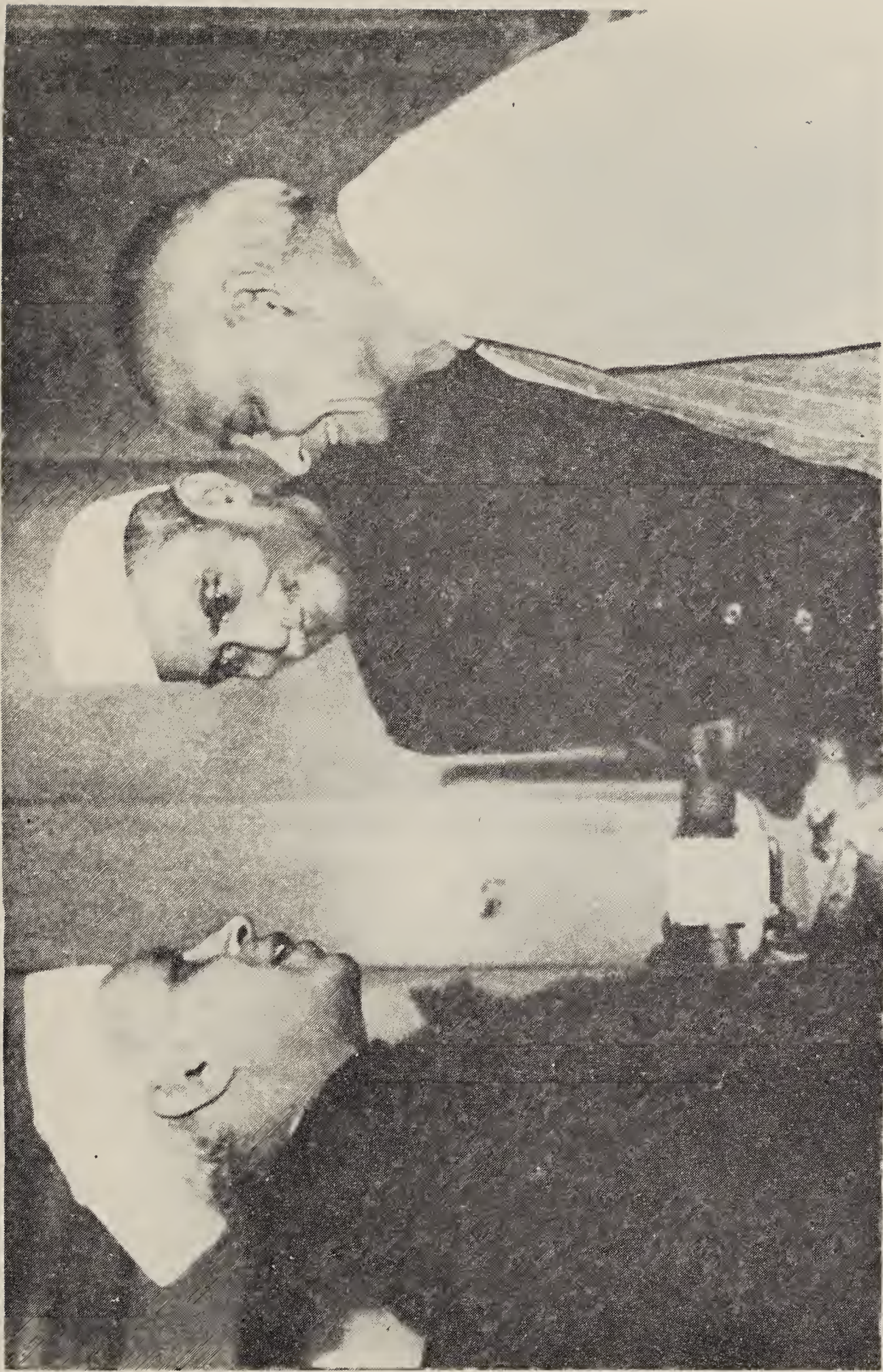
With his family on his birthday, October 31, 1948. From left, daughter-in-law Bhanumati (sitting), daughter Manibehn, grandson Bipin, Grandson Gautam and son Dalhyabhai. Standing next to Manibehn is Patel's Private Secretary V. Shankar



In the garden of 1, Aurangzeb Road, New Delhi, 1949



With Azad



Premier Nehru, President Prasad and Deputy Premier Patel



Bombay, December 15, 1950

Wavell's words, he asked for "the absolute right to select all Muslims".¹⁰ If it conceded the demand, Congress would be reduced to a Hindu party. Wavell's compromise solution, acceptable to Congress, of a non-Congress non-League Muslim filling one of the Muslim seats,* with the League filling the rest, was also turned down by Jinnah.

Wavell could have responded with a Council of five or six Congressmen and an equal number of non-Congress Muslims, the latter headed, perhaps, by Khizr Hyat Khan, the Unionist Premier of Punjab. Or, taking Congress's representatives on his Council, he could have kept the League's places vacant for a while. Disregarding the advice of some of the Governors, Wavell adopted neither course. Though Jinnah's attitude was, in Wavell's words, "entirely unacceptable"¹¹ to him, a Congress-dominated Council was even more so. He had not forgotten Quit India; and he and the Raj did not want Jinnah, the rebels' principal foe, to lose ground.

All he did, therefore, was to announce that the talks had failed and participants could go home. Jinnah's stock soared. Ten months earlier, the Muslim masses had seen the Mahatma knocking on his door. Now they saw the Viceroy yielding to him. And Muslim politicians saw a barren future for themselves unless they were linked with Jinnah.

Nonetheless, the three weeks in the Himalayas refreshed weary bodies and spirits. Doctor Gandhi's nature cure was pressed afresh on Vallabhbhai, who agreed to spend several months in a Poona clinic. He did not get to know Wavell in Simla. Though well aware of Patel's influence, the Viceroy, who dealt with Azad as Congress's President and with Gandhi as its guide and invited Jawaharlal and Prasad for informal talks, did not ask the Sardar over.

As they had heard in Ahmednagar, Wavell was prejudiced against Vallabhbhai. "I am told," Wavell would soon write in his diary, "that there is a considerable struggle going on inside Congress between the advocates of cooperation (on Congress terms) and violence. Vallabhbhai Patel of course advocates the latter." Informants told Wavell that Patel was "the strong man of Congress" and "a proper tough, the real driving force behind Congress's aggressive policy."¹² To Wavell toughness seemed synonymous with violence.

Softness was not the note in Vallabhbhai's post-release speeches. He let himself go on August 9, the anniversary of the 1942 arrests. Three days earlier the atom bomb had been dropped on Hiroshima:

* The Viceroy had in mind naming a Unionist Muslim from the Punjab – the Unionists had helped recruit soldiers.

Entire cities, children, the old, animals and all, have been wiped out. What a demonstration of the limitless cruelty of western civilisation!...

The British talk of Hindu-Muslim quarrels but who has thrust this burden on their shoulders? If they are sincere let them hand over to Congress or the League or accept international arbitration.

Give me just a week's rule over Britain. I will create such disagreements that England, Wales and Scotland will fight one another for ever.¹³

"I find your speech rather hot," Gandhi wrote, "but that does not matter. You cannot contain all that you feel within yourself."¹⁴

Quit India had achieved more than Azad and Jawaharlal had realized in prison. Not by itself, of course: tired by the War, Britain was unwilling to fight over her colonies. Britons expected to quit and Indians sensed the approach of freedom. Several Quit India activists were, however, still underground, evading arrest. They were grateful for Patel's exertions in those crucial days before August 9, 1942; he valued their courage and stamina and the spirit of revolt they had disseminated in the land. Some of the activists had taken part in sabotage and destruction but they did not tell him precisely of what they did, and he did not ask. On his 70th birthday a letter from the underground was placed in his hands:

The incognito lives into which we have been forced by the government's kindness prevents us from greeting you in person. We are not facing any exceptional difficulties. We are gratified about one thing, that we have done all we could, in the way that occurred to us, to defend the nation's honour and pride. We have not been unfaithful to ourselves.

You must have been delighted to see the rich crop raised by the lessons of steadfastness and fearlessness that you and the Mahatma gave to Gujarat and all of India. Our heads bow before your bravery and selfless love of country.¹⁵

In his reply Vallabhbhai said :

Night and day I think of you. I am sad of course that you cannot declare yourselves but feel that you are right in staying where you are. That I am unable to assist you troubles me but the knowledge that you are well, careful and happy lessens my anxiety. I am grateful for your love.¹⁶

While confirmed in his view of Quit India, Patel could not accept that the Mahatma's approach to Jinnah had been wise. He told the

Mahatma so. Gandhi defended himself – “I could not have done anything else” –, asked Vallabhbhai to express his disagreement “from the housetops” but added that Jinnah’s summary rejection of his offer had made the question academic. Also, the offer was “final” – there were to be no new concessions.¹⁷ The Sardar was not convinced. He agreed with Azad that Gandhi’s visits had given “a new and added importance to Mr. Jinnah.”¹⁸ But he did not take to the housetops. It was spilt milk.

Hitler could not defeat Churchill but, at the end of July, the British voter did. Labour replaced the Tories. In August Japan surrendered. Wavell went again to London, where Churchill, now in opposition, exhorted him to “keep a bit of India” even if much of it had to be yielded.¹⁹ The Viceroy’s consultations with his new principals, Attlee, Cripps and company, produced a decision to hold fresh elections in India – for the Central and provincial assemblies.

Dr Dinshaw Mehta’s nature cure clinic in Poona, where Vallabhbhai was a patient and the Mahatma a visiting expert, began to hum with election planning. Gandhi spoke of “the darbar that surrounds the Sardar”.²⁰ President Azad was chairman of Congress’s eight-man election board but Patel was designated “Member-in-charge”. Of the other six on the board – Prasad, Kripalani, Pant Pattabhi, Deo and Asaf –, the first five generally agreed with Vallabhbhai, who thus exercised great influence. Once more he was Congress’s principal fund-collector, a circumstance that could only add to his authority. Joining Patel at this stage as the board’s secretary, Shantilal Shah, a Congressman with a socialist background, recalls an incident:

Desiring to improve an image that was none too bright, a big industrialist sent me a message: could he not give two lakh rupees for Congress’s election fund? After obtaining Sardar’s permission I conveyed word that the sum would be accepted, to which the answer was: “Would Sardar Saheb be good enough to come to my home for tea? I will hand over the cheque at that time.”

“Tell him,” Sardar Saheb said to me, “that I am not a beggar. I am not going to his house.” Sardar Saheb did not go to his house but the two lakhs were received.

One morning, over breakfast, Shah told Vallabhbhai about a caller who was threatening to go home and kill himself if denied a ticket. Handing Shah a knife, the Sardar said: “Tell him he doesn’t need to go home. He can kill himself with this here.” Later in the day Patel said to Shah, “No one wanting to take his life asks for permission.”²¹

Freeing himself from the Poona clinic, Vallabhbhai ran the election from a small room in Bombay’s Congress House. He asked Jawaharlal

to write out "a small election manifesto" with Quit India as its basis.²² Nehru did as requested.²³ While enjoining care in the use of money and always asking for accounts, Patel was unstinting in his response to the pleas that poured in. "It must be understood between us," he wrote to Azad, "that no seats should be lost for want of money."²⁴

After having held it for 25 years, he gave up the GPCC presidency and asked Kanjibhai Desai to take over. When a diffident Kanjibhai spoke of "the gap between you and me", Vallabhbhai answered: "When I took over from Bapu (in 1920), the gap between him and me was greater than the gap you speak of." The lesson in humility was one that neither Kanjibhai nor his son Hitendra would forget.²⁵

Some notable quarrels were forgotten in 1945. Rajaji was accepted back into Congress. Patel hoped he would enter the Central Assembly and lead Congress there, but C.R.'s mind was in his province. Critics in Madras of Rajaji's 1942 position were told by Vallabhbhai that C.R. was "one of my dearest friends, a lifelong colleague and...head and shoulders above all Congressmen in the province in ability, integrity and sincerity".²⁶

There was a report at the end of August that a Japanese plane carrying Subhas had crashed, killing him, but neither Congress nor the Raj believed the news. "It is just what would be given out if he meant to go underground," Wavell wrote in his diary.²⁷ But it was true. Patel had earlier claimed Subhas as a colleague and fellow-fighter²⁸ and was willing to help the personnel and dependants of the Indian National Army (INA) which had been sponsored by the Japanese and led, from the summer of 1943, by Subhas. A Congress committee set up to assist relatives of INA soldiers killed in action against the Allies was headed by Vallabhbhai.

There was expediency in this role, for Subhas's prestige was at its height at this time, but also heart. Patel did admire Subhas's bravery; and Bose's supporters, led by Sarat, admired Vallabhbhai in turn for his Quit India stand. He had done in 1942 what Subhas had asked for in 1939. Emerging from prison in the autumn of 1945, Sarat, in his own words, "greeted the Sardar of Bardoli as the Sardar of India".²⁹ Congress explained that support for the INA did not mean that it had "deviated from its policy of attaining Swaraj by peaceful and legitimate means".³⁰ A further clarification of stand and tactics was offered by Patel in a letter to Biswanath Das, a former Premier of Orissa:

*The Congress recognizes the bravery and sacrifice of the INA people. That does not mean that the stand their leader took was right. The Congress has never accepted that position.... However, we must, for the time being, be a little more tolerant.*³¹

Reciprocating Sarat's warmth, Vallabhbhai visualized him as the leader of Congress's team in the Central Assembly. The body had little real power and there was no question of Patel, Nehru, Azad or Prasad entering it, yet to lead Congress there was not a small honour. When C.R. said he was unwilling to accept it, Vallabhbhai thought of Sarat.

The man who had led Congress in the previous Assembly, Bhulabhai, did not even get a ticket this time. We have already noted Patel's and the WorCom's reactions to Desai's 1942 position and to his role over the abortive pact with Liaquat. Rejection shattered Bhulabhai and pained his numerous friends and admirers, for he was an excellent debater and had served Congress with distinction since 1928, when he argued before the Broomfield-Maxwell Committee on behalf of Vallabhbhai and the peasants.

Azad has charged, without elaboration or proof, that Patel "took a special interest" in excluding Bhulabhai,³² but he forgets to mention that Bhulabhai's name was left out of a list of names for the Executive Council that Azad himself, on Congress's behalf, had given to Wavell in July.³³ In another remark aimed at Vallabhbhai, Azad says that "some of the older members of the Congress" became "jealous of Bhulabhai"³⁴ but the truth is that Desai was too unwell and too elitist to pose even a remote threat to Patel's position in Congress. If there was one man who kept Bhulabhai out of the Assembly, it was Gandhi, not Patel. Referring, in a letter to Bhulabhai, to telegrams he and Vallabhbhai were receiving that urged Bhulabhai's nomination, the Mahatma said:

*If I were not behind this decision even Sardar would submit to the pressure. I myself am firm.... I am advising you that you yourself should make a dignified statement announcing that at this moment you do not intend to remain in the Legislative Assembly.*³⁵

* * *

Vallabhbhai blamed Azad for not moving about enough,³⁶ clashed with him over the Congress group's leadership in the Central Assembly – Asaf Ali was Azad's preference³⁷ –, and strongly objected when the Maulana awarded a Congress ticket in the C.P. to a man rejected by the election board.

Patel to Azad, 23.2.46: *If you wanted to change the decision, you should have at least consulted us. There can be no appeal against the decision of the board.... Besides, if you were the appellate authority you cannot at the same time be the chairman of the board whose decisions are appealable to you alone.*³⁸

At issue was the old question of the President's powers. As before, Vallabhbhai insisted that these were not Prime Ministerial, and that a Congress President was only first among equals. He rebuked Shukla, the Congress chief in the C.P., for having accepted Azad's alteration,³⁹ complained to the Mahatma of the Maulana's "arbitrariness"⁴⁰ and asked Azad to relieve him. There was no question, however, of the Maulana agreeing to do this.

The elections and their cost troubled Gandhi, who desired Congress's victory but hated the implications of dependence on the funds of the rich. His advice to Patel was to abstain from money-raising. "But," the Sardar would write afterwards to the Mahatma, "the Maulana and the Working Committee wanted me. I did the work as I felt it was unavoidable. We would have all been blamed if it had not been done."⁴¹ Well aware that money-raising created obligations, Vallabhbhai nevertheless took it on. Somebody had to. The Mahatma's line was not practical. He would go against it.

It was a landmark step. His 1940 stand in favour of Rajaji's proposal and against the Mahatma's view stood on a different footing. At that time Gandhi had specifically urged Patel to follow his reason and not the Mahatma's lead. No such injunction accompanied Gandhi's advice this time. Implementing the thought that had taken shape in the Keep, Vallabhbhai had freed himself from the pledge to follow Gandhi. At three score and ten he needed to offer no explanation for wanting to be his own man.

"I do not like the Sardar collecting money from businessmen," Gandhi told Birla. When Ghanshyamdas relayed the remark to Patel, the latter said: "That is not his concern. Gandhi is a Mahatma. I am not. I have to do the job."⁴²

Vallabhbhai's post-Ahmednagar independence was sensed by the Mahatma. Perhaps he was acknowledging it when, early in January 1946, he said in a letter to Patel, "You are after all the Sardar of Bardoli and, as it happens, of India."⁴³ Two months earlier, on Vallabhbhai's birthday, he had said, "Sardar is as dear as a son to me".⁴⁴ The description was a departure and reflected the new relationship. A younger brother, we noted earlier, is an aide but a son leads his own life.

Independence did not mean separation or an end to teamwork. Each continued to seek the other's company and advice. Patel sought the Mahatma's opinion on a request for secret funding made by some Muslims who were prepared to contest Muslim seats against the League but not as Congressmen; they were aware of the qaum's dislike of Congress. Vallabhbhai did not approve of the idea but neither had he dismissed it. Gandhi answered:

*You must flatly refuse to give any secret help. It would be highly improper. It can never remain secret. No one would or should accept such help openly.... Never mind if we do not succeed.*⁴⁵

The Aga Khan, rich, influential and head of the Khoja community to which Jinnah belonged, had sent for Vallabhbhai, who gave the Mahatma an account of the meeting.

Patel to Gandhi, 28.12.45: *He spoke of settling with Jinnah. I said, "We, that is Congress, are not going to him for talks! He insults us again and again and doesn't want to do anything." Said he: "Right now he seems in a good mood." I said: "I don't agree at all. He knows that we have decided not to go to him and thinks he can lure us. But there is no question of our going to him."*⁴⁶

The election results showed that except in the N.W.F.P. the League commanded the Muslim vote. The non-Muslim vote was solidly with Congress, which won 56 seats in the Central Assembly and 930 in the provinces, but the League obtained all 30 Muslim seats in the Central Assembly and 427 of the 507 Muslim seats in the provinces. The also-ran party of 1937 was, in 1946, Congress's principal challenger and unquestionably the qaum's voice. Several factors had aided its rise: the image of Hindu Raj following the installation of Congress's provincial ministries; the free run enjoyed by the League after these ministries resigned; Jinnah's grit; the Islam-in-danger cry; the qaum's feeling that the British should restore power to those from whom they had taken it, that is the Muslims; Hitler's war, destroying the Congress-Raj partnership*; the Raj's encouragement, as soon as the war started, of the League; Quit India, which perturbed both the Raj and the qaum and brought them closer to each other; the Mahatma's knocks on Jinnah's door; Wavell's capitulation before Jinnah in Simla; and more. In the long view, the qaum separated from India as India moved towards freedom.

Congress formed eight provincial ministries and shared the Punjab ministry with Unionists and Akalis: Khizr Hyat Khan headed it. The League and its allies controlled Bengal and Sind. Congressmen who hated the Hindu-Muslim polarization saw a silver lining in the N.W.F.P., where the Khan brothers defeated the League in an election fought on the question of Pakistan. In a letter to an N.W.F.P. Congressman, Patel spoke of "the brilliant success achieved against

* "There was going to be a deal between Mr Gandhi and Lord Linlithgow. Providence helped us. The war which nobody welcomes proved to be a blessing in disguise." – Jinnah in 1945, quoted in Philips and Wainwright, *The Partition of India*, p. 286.

heavy odds” and added: “Let us hope that the League will find its grave in the Frontier province.”⁴⁸

Unlike Jawaharlal, who sometimes imagined Hindu-Muslim unity when it did not exist, Vallabhbhai was frank about the reality. Also, he felt it unnecessary to give a “secular” wrapping to his utterances. He had no difficulty, for instance, in describing “general” or unreserved seats as Hindu seats.⁴⁹ But Patel had not yet given up on Hindu-Muslim understanding. Encouraged by Congress’s success in some Muslim seats in Bihar and U.P., he wrote, at the end of March, to a Bihar-based industrialist:

*Congressmen have not worked in rural areas and in the cities they work only amongst non-Muslims. The results have shown that...if Congressmen will work honestly for communal unity there is an excellent opportunity for reviving the old atmosphere of Hindu-Muslim unity all over India.*⁵⁰

Yet the Sardar’s own work among Muslims remained minimal. He had known some Muslims well – a servant in Bakrol, a tenant in Karamsad, Qureshi of the Sabarmati Ashram and Congress colleagues including Abbas Tyabji, Dr Ansari, Ghaffar Khan and Maulana Azad. Yet he did not move in the Muslims’ world and they did not move in his. Whereas Gandhi sought to represent Muslims as well as Hindus and said, “I cannot speak as a mere Hindu,.. I can speak only as an Indian”,⁵¹ Vallabhbhai never tried or claimed to represent Muslims. And he found it natural to speak as a Hindu.

Three INA officers, of whom one was a Hindu, another a Sikh and the third a Muslim, were tried at the end of 1945 for waging war against the King. Congress undertook their defence, which was led by Bhulabhai Desai and supported by a panel of eminent lawyers including Jawaharlal. Held in Delhi’s Red Fort but followed all over the land, the trial aroused strong sentiment in favour of the accused, the INA, Congress and Indian independence. Despite a memorable effort – climaxing a lifetime of gifted advocacy – by Bhulabhai, who would die in May 1946, the accused were sentenced to transportation for life. But the sentence was not carried out, the Raj realizing how greatly the public and even many in its army sympathized with the accused.⁵² Early in January, the three were released.

The Raj’s climbdown was a sign to Vallabhbhai that “the freedom of India is near and it is for Indians to take it”. Even earlier he had said that the British had only to be “helped to roll up their bedding and depart”. Nehru’s more pessimistic reading was mistaken. “Nehru told me in 1946,” Louis Fischer would later recall, “that the British were

not leaving the country."⁵³ Despite his assessment, Vallabhbhai's utterances continued to be hot. On his 70th birthday, speaking at the spot where Quit India was proclaimed, he had said:

*The Congress is not going to sit quiet after the elections.... It will demand an immediate and final solution of the Indian problem. If it is not forthcoming and if the British government try to put further obstacles in the way of India's progress, sure as day follows night, there will follow another struggle.*⁵⁴

Reporting these words to HMG in London, Wavell added that in his view Patel was planning a "rising" or a "coup" aimed at "the expulsion of the British". Congress was likely, the Viceroy added, to make "a serious attempt" under the leadership of Patel and Nehru "to subvert by force the present administration in India."⁵⁵

Prejudice and alarm had led Wavell to this false prognosis. Believing the worst about Vallabhbhai, Wavell saw no difference between a struggle and subversion by force; and he was shaken by the realization that "Congress commands the support of practically the whole of articulate Hindu opinion".⁵⁶ Expecting a violent rising, he asked HMG to be ready to "use a considerable force of British troops," declare "martial law in parts of India," detain "large numbers without trial" and ban Congress indefinitely.⁵⁷ However, Wavell ceased speaking in these terms after he met Vallabhbhai in January 1946. His diary entry about the meeting was almost a confession of error:

I saw Vallabhbhai Patel for the first time this morning. Not an attractive personality and uncompromising, but more of a man than most of the Indian politicians I have met.... Patel at once began with allegations that the British were supporting Mr Jinnah and the Muslim League, that Jinnah had been allowed to wreck the Simla conference, that his manners to Azad had been intolerable, and so on....

He said that he did not see how there was ever going to be a settlement between Hindus and Muslims while the British were in India, and that the British should clear out and leave Indians to settle matters themselves. I said he really could not expect us to leave India to chaos and civil war, and that there must be some sort of settlement.

*I did not introduce the issue of Pakistan, as the tone of his approach did not seem to favour it, and merely said that it was my business to see that law and order was maintained until some new form of Government was settled. He agreed with this.*⁵⁸

Five days after his meeting with Patel, Wavell received "a telegram... from H.M.G. to say that they propose to send a delegation of three Ministers to negotiate a settlement of the Indian problem".⁵⁹ The date of this message, January 24, is relevant, for it takes care of the widely accepted myth that the Cabinet Mission was sparked by the February 1946 mutiny in the Royal Indian Navy and the unrest at about the same time in the Royal Indian Air Force.

In the third week of February, some members of the RIAF went on hunger-strike over pay and the pace of demobilization. The rebellion of naval ratings, a romantic bid led by young men who consciously "channelised a general discontent into a mutiny,"⁶⁰ was more serious. As B. C. Dutt, one of the mutiny's initiators, would later admit, he and his colleagues were "immature"⁶¹ and "strangers to all political parties."⁶² But they were audacious and reckless as well; the INA episode had thrilled them; and they dreamt of instant Indian liberty. By focussing on the discriminatory attitudes of some white officers and on the food given to ratings, they rallied their less radical mates. The mutiny began on February 19. Ratings took over the shore-based signal school, HMIS Talwar, where the Union Jack was hauled down. A Naval Central Strike Committee (NCSC) was immediately elected, shore-to-ship and ship-to-ship communications were set up, several ships were swiftly seized and Congress and League flags flown over them. No officer joined the ratings but their young chiefs felt they were in a position to "offer the Royal Indian Navy on a platter" to any Indian leader willing to take it.⁶³

Learning that Aruna Asaf Ali, of whose radical reputation and underground role in 1942 they had heard, was in Bombay, they approached her. But, in Dutt's words, "she merely advised us to remain calm...and to take up [our] service demands with the Naval authorities". Also, Aruna "directed" the leaders of the mutiny to Vallabhbhai and to the Muslim League.⁶⁴ "Disowned" by Aruna, the mutineers sent negotiators on February 20 to Vice Admiral J. H. Godfrey, the Flag Officer Commanding the Royal Indian Navy, who suggested that "all ratings should return to their ships and establishments."⁶⁵ This the ratings were not yet prepared to do.

* Here are three examples: "It seems more than a mere coincidence that the announcement about the British Cabinet Mission was made on February 19, 1946, one day after the outbreak of the mutiny." – Brecher, M., *Nehru*, pp.308-9. "It was the irreversible loss of imperial power that provided the rationale for the decision of Attlee's government to send out a special mission of three Cabinet Ministers..." – Gopal, S., *Jawaharlal Nehru*, Vol.I, p.312, right after an account of the RIN mutiny. "The Bombay mutiny undoubtedly had its effect on London, for a day after the outbreak Clement Attlee announced that a delegation of senior British cabinet ministers would go to India." – Edwardes, M., *Nehru*, p.166

Bullets replaced words the next day, February 21, which saw a prolonged exchange of fire between desperate shore-based mutineers and loyal troops trying to confine them to barracks. Many ratings were killed. Aruna, backed by Achyut Patwardhan and also by some Communist leaders, urged Bombay's workers and students to strike in sympathy with the ratings. Patel opposed the call and many heeded him but a number of millhands and students took to the streets on February 22. "Shops were looted, commuters were robbed, public buildings burnt down, railway stations set afire and fire engines too," to quote from a letter that Vallabhbhai wrote to Gandhi. Also, there was "a regular fury against Englishmen and English dress".⁶⁶

The mutineers, however, "had no more fight left in them" and "wanted to forget the whole miserable business."⁶⁷ As "directed," their leaders had gone to Vallabhbhai, who frankly told them that he endorsed the Commander-in-Chief's view that "there ought to be discipline in the navy"⁶⁸ and advised the ratings to surrender. The NCSC president, M. S. Khan, was by this time exhausted by the mutiny, now in its fourth day. "Hardly able to stand erect" and "in tears," Khan conveyed the Sardar's message to his mates on the evening of February 22:

*In the present unfortunate circumstances, the advice of the Congress is to lay down arms and to go through the formality of surrender.... The Congress will do its level best to see that there is no victimisation and the legitimate demands of the ratings are accepted as soon as possible. Having agreed to be guided by the national leaders and now having been asked to surrender, we must do so. We are not surrendering to the British. We are surrendering to our own people.*⁶⁹

Some Muslim ratings wanted to know what Jinnah's advice was. It arrived after midnight and was the same as Vallabhbhai's. Instructions to surrender were signalled to all ships, each message citing the Sardar's counsel and assurance. On February 23 the mutiny, "a great futility"⁷⁰ as Dutt would later call it, was over.⁷¹

The mutiny and related disturbances in Bombay city took 236 lives and saw 1156 injured. The toll was contained at this level because Vallabhbhai persuaded the ratings to surrender and also because, as the Bombay government informed New Delhi, the Sardar "exerted himself to prevent the calling of hartals in sympathy with the RIN ratings and repeatedly censured the disgraceful exhibitions of hooliganism".⁷²

It did not worry Patel in the slightest that both he and the Raj had wanted the mutiny to end. "We are done for, finished, if we don't stand up to this," he said in a letter to Gandhi on February 24.⁷³ Writing to Jawaharlal on February 22 – before the surrender – he had said: "The Communists and the socialists headed by Achyut and Aruna called for a strike, – contrary to our advice. We shall have to tackle this problem of growing violence, otherwise our game is about to be lost."⁷⁴ Vallabhbhai had not struggled for 28 years to hand over Bombay and India to romantic mutineers or to arsonists and men who demanded money at knifepoint. Unhappy at Patel's role, Aruna urged Jawaharlal to intervene. What happened next is best conveyed by an account that Vallabhbhai sent to the Mahatma:

She wired Jawahar. She has a newspaper (Free Press Journal) write that Jawahar was the only leader capable of handling the situation. The reason was that she could not get my support. Jawahar sent me a wire saying that if necessary he would leave important work and come. I replied that he need not.

Even so he comes tomorrow. A telegram from him says that though he has received my wire he is coming because he would feel uneasy if he did not. Let him. But it is very wrong that he comes in response to her wire.⁷⁵

The mutiny and the violence were over by the time Jawaharlal arrived in Bombay. Patel met him at the station and took him to a public meeting, where both deplored the violence. However, as the Home Secretary of Bombay put it to the Home Secretary in New Delhi,

There was a decided difference between the two, Patel being markedly unsympathetic to the mutiny and strongly condemnatory of the violence of the mob, while Nehru was much more sympathetic towards the mutineers and mainly concerned to deprecate the violence as bad tactics...against the "superior violence" of the armed forces.⁷⁶

Gandhi, who had called the mutiny "unbecoming", said that it was "a matter of great relief that the ratings have listened to Sardar Patel's advice to surrender".⁷⁷ "R.I.N. mutiny at Bombay is apparently in hand," Wavell noted in his diary.⁷⁸ It was understandable, in the light of his prejudice, that the Viceroy did not add a reference to Vallabhbhai's role. The gap would be filled after Wavell's death by his journal's editor, who looked at the Raj's records and wrote:

"Vallabhbhai Patel personally intervened to induce the ratings to surrender."⁷⁹

* * *

"If India elects for independence," Prime Minister Clement Attlee told the House of Commons on March 15, "she has a right to do so."⁸⁰ Britain, in other words, had decided to quit. That was the meaning, too, of HMG's message to Wavell in January about the Cabinet Mission. Though the process of departure remained to be worked out, Indians could no longer accuse Britain of clinging to the Raj.

Heat and passion were now to be concentrated in the Hindu-Muslim and Congress-League relationships. The Raj was the prize, the two communities and the two parties the contenders. Secession was Congress's fear, submergence the qaum's. A Pakistan comprising Sind, the N.W.F.P., all of Punjab, all of Bengal and Assam was the League's desire, the Muslim dream and Jinnah's objective. Only such an aggregation was thought capable of standing up to Hindu India.

Congress was less clear about its goal. It could not decide whether it wanted all of India in a loose union or India minus the Muslim-majority parts in a tighter union. A tight union embracing all of India was rejected as being both unrealistic and coercive. Some Hindus espoused it but they were all outside Congress. Neither Patel nor the Mahatma nor Jawaharlal nor Azad considered it a serious option. Vallabhbhai and Jawaharlal were for a strong centre, though Nehru was more willing than Vallabhbhai to risk a weaker centre if that would retain the Muslim areas. Gandhi and the Maulana thought that strong provinces would blunt the edge of separation. These two and Nehru wanted to disprove the two-nation theory. Unlike the rest of the High Command, Jawaharlal also placed value on a formal and immediate end of the British connection. In singleness of aim, therefore, Congress was much the weaker of the two parties contending for the Raj.

From the end of March to the end of June, in Delhi, Simla and again in Delhi, Congress talked with the Cabinet Mission from Britain. Lord Pethick-Lawrence, Secretary of State for India, an elderly pacifist, led the team of three, but its dominant personality was Sir Stafford Cripps, President of the Board of Trade, brilliant, tireless and endowed, as Wavell put it, "with the ability to make both black and white appear a neutral and acceptable grey."⁸¹ A.V. Alexander, the third member, was First Lord of the Admiralty and belonged, like the other two, to Labour. "An imperialist disliking any idea of leaving India," as the Viceroy described him, Alexander got on extremely well with Wavell, in effect the fourth member of the team, who regretted that the First Lord did not lead it.⁸²

The Mission had two tasks: to devise a long-term constitutional solution and to convert the Executive Council into a representative Interim Government. It tackled them one at a time. Jinnah demanded greater Pakistan – “all six provinces and complete sovereignty”.⁸³ The Mission asked him whether he would accept the limited Pakistan of C.R.’s formula if it was entirely sovereign – the Pakistan, in other words, that Jinnah obtained a year later. Jinnah said no. Even if he had said yes Congress might well have opposed it; the party was not ready, in the summer of 1946, to concede the sovereignty to which it agreed a year later. Gandhi asked the Mission not to strive for Congress-League agreement: “You must make your choice of one horse or the other....For God’s sake do not make an incompatible mixture and in trying to do so produce a fearful explosion.”⁸⁴

Less willing to rule out a settlement, Azad proposed his loose all-India union with substantial provincial autonomy. Cripps enquired if Azad would extend provincial autonomy to autonomy for the Greater Pakistan area. After some hesitation the Maulana said he could concede the point “provided the compulsory link between the different parts of India was not in any way interfered with”.⁸⁵ This was the origin of the grouping scheme that the Mission finally proposed, a “federation within a federation”, to quote Cripps’s words in the talk with Azad.⁸⁶ Given trust, such a solution might have worked but trust was precisely what the India of 1946 lacked. Congress feared that the League would run away with Greater Pakistan; the League feared that Congress would destroy Muslim autonomy.

Though trust was short, the talks were long. They revolved round a tentative “solution” sketched by the Mission: a Union Centre for, “as a minimum, defence, foreign affairs and communications”, and two autonomous Groups or federations within the Union, “with equal representation in the Centre”. One Group might consist of “the whole of the provinces of Sind, Baluchistan, the NWFP, the Punjab and Bengal (plus perhaps Sylhet),” and the other of the Hindu majority provinces. Congress and the League were assured that participation in the talks would not be taken as acceptance of the “solution”.⁸⁷

Congress’s representatives were Azad, who was still the President, Vallabhbhai, serving for the first time as an official Congress negotiator, Jawaharlal, who did much of the speaking, and Ghaffar Khan, whose inclusion on the team conveyed the importance they gave to the N.W.F.P. The Mahatma’s role was “unofficial” but not inconsequential. Patel’s interventions at the formal sessions were infrequent and brief but significant. He used one of them to reject Hindu-Muslim parity at the Centre.⁸⁸ In his diary, Wavell described the Sardar as one with “rather a Roman face, powerful, clever, uncompromising”.⁸⁹ Vallabhbhai’s distrust of the League and his

vigilant opposition to Pakistan emerge from Wavell's account of the May 6 talks, which also bring out Jinnah's attachment to Greater Pakistan and revulsion against the idea of an Indian Union:

The first point of controversy arose over the... Union Centre, Congress wishing it to have powers of direct taxation and to be self-supporting, while Jinnah advocated that it should be given a lump sum and should have to go to the Groups if it wanted any more....

On the matter of a central legislature, Jinnah stonewalled obstinately but we eventually got J. to admit that parity of representatives from the two Groups would be "the least objectionable" form.... Finally it seemed to be generally agreed – at least J. did not dissent – that a central judiciary would be necessary....

We finally got down to an announcement by J. that he would accept the Union Centre if Congress would accept Groups. Nehru said something very near acceptance of J.'s proposition, and Patel's cold face of angry disapproval was a study....*

At one moment Jinnah seemed to claim the right of a Group to secede after five years; and Patel exclaimed triumphantly, "There we have it now, what he has been after all the time." The damage had been done in Patel's mind, and he had been given a handle for his contention that the League are not really in earnest about entering a Union and mean to get out as soon as possible.⁹¹

To demonstrate to the Mission that the qaum backed his claim, Jinnah had convened a rally in Delhi of all the legislators, central and provincial, elected on the League ticket. The rally asked, on April 9, for "a sovereign independent state" comprising all of Bengal, Punjab, Sind, N.W.F.P., Assam and Baluchistan and pledged that the League "will never participate" in any Constituent Assembly formed to settle a constitution for a united India.⁹² It was in the light of the rally pronouncements that Vallabhbhai and his Congress colleagues weighed Jinnah's uncertain "acceptance" of a Union Centre. Concluding that the acceptance was insincere, they told the Mission that they would not accept a mandatory Group. In their view Jinnah and the League were likely, indeed committed, to take the Muslim Group out of India.

* According to S. Gopal, "Jawaharlal said that while his position came near to that of Jinnah, any Union would be futile without a legislature and the provinces must decide for themselves about groupings."⁹⁰

Cripps's ingenuity rose to the occasion. He prepared an "award" designed to reconcile the irreconcilable. Adopted by his colleagues, it became the Cabinet Mission Plan of May 16.⁹³ Brilliant, unworkable and fatally inconsistent, it provided, in Sections 13 and 15, for a Centre dealing with foreign affairs, defence and communications; provinces controlling everything else; and the possibility of Groups which provinces were "free to form" in "the exercise of their autonomous powers". A few paras later, however, in Section 19, the award laid down a procedure that would tie Assam (which in the original "sketch" was placed in the Hindu Group) to Bengal in a Muslim Group in the east; and likewise compel the N.W.F.P. to join the "Pakistan" Group in the west, along with all of Punjab, Sind and Baluchistan.

Since there was nothing to prevent the two Muslim Groups from acting in concert, the latter part of the award, Section 19, gave greater Pakistan – in area if not in sovereignty – to the League. Provincial assemblies would elect delegates to a Constituent Assembly, their number proportional to the population of each province and their Muslim/non-Muslim ratio reflecting the province's communal composition. After a preliminary hearing, the Assembly would split into three Sections. Members from Hindu-majority provinces, barring Assam, would go into Section A; delegates from Punjab, Sind and the N.W.F.P. plus a nominee from Baluchistan would go into Section B; members from Bengal and Assam into Section C. Thereafter – and this was the provision that negated a province's "exercise of its autonomous powers" – "these sections *shall* proceed to settle the provincial constitutions for the provinces included in each section" and also form Groups.

This was not a province offering to join a Group; it was a Group swallowing a province. A sub-clause in Section 19 did give a province the right to opt out of a Group *after* the Group had framed its constitution. A new provincial legislature elected under the new constitution could exercise the option. But what if Punjab's Muslims, who would enjoy dominance in Section B, gave a constitution to the N.W.F.P. that by gerrymandering or special provisions impeded or barred a Congress victory? In such a case the N.W.F.P. would be forced to remain in the "Pakistan" Group even though the League, campaigning on the issue of Pakistan, had just been defeated there. Again, if Bengali Muslims dictated Assam's constitution – and Bengali Muslims continued to migrate into Assam –, that could block Assam's exit from Pakistan.*

* Congressmen also feared that Sections B and C might rule that "no unit can opt out except by a two-third majority".⁹⁴

The step-by-step procedure outlined in Section 19 ensured that the Groups, two Muslim and one Hindu, would be formed *before* work started on a constitution for the Indian Union. This was a sop to the League. In a matching gesture to Congress, the idea of Hindu-Muslim parity in the Union Constituent Assembly was given up: its Muslim proportion was not to exceed the Muslim ratio in the population. A balancing provision assured the League that "any major communal issue shall require a majority of the representatives present and voting of each of the two major communities". If a majority of the Muslim members felt that a subject was "major" in a communal sense but the Assembly as a whole or the President thought otherwise, the Federal Court would adjudicate.

What most pleased the Congress ear was the Plan's explicit rejection of Pakistan: "neither a larger nor a smaller sovereign state of Pakistan would provide an acceptable solution." Yet while Congress gloated over this sentence, Jinnah claimed that the two Muslim Groups gave him Pakistan. In its formal response, the League held that Section 19 constituted Pakistan's "foundation and basis". Simultaneously, Congress underlined portions of the Plan it liked and thanked the Mission for ruling out not only Pakistan but compulsory grouping as well! Cripps would soon claim in the House of Commons that his wording was "purposely vague".⁹⁵ Getting both Congress and the League to "accept" different and contradictory provisions was the purpose.

We will soon see that the ingenuity displayed in the language of the Plan and the negotiations for its acceptance led in the end to shock, indignation and clash, but let us first look at some more instances of it. Firstly, as the talks proceeded, the grouping provision had been steadily rephrased. When the wording was changed to "Groups of provinces may be formed" – more or less the final language of Section 15 –, Jinnah protested that "the question of grouping of provinces is left exactly as the Congress spokesmen desired".⁹⁶ Wavell disliked this alteration and understood its significance but Cripps and Pethick-Lawrence were determined to provide Congress with a palatable bite.⁹⁷

Then, after the Plan was announced, Woodrow Wyatt, an aide to the Mission, advised Jinnah that though Pakistan had been turned down, the League could accept the scheme "as the first step on the road to Pakistan". "At this proposition," – Wyatt noted – Jinnah "was delighted" though earlier in the conversation he had repeated his unhappiness with Para 15. "That's it, you've got it," he told Wyatt.⁹⁸

Also, the Mission privately told the League on May 16 – but not the Congress – that a simple majority vote in a Muslim Section would decide grouping. If Sind, the N.W.F.P., Baluchistan and Punjab had,

for this purpose, a vote each, their joint decision would be a fairer reflection of the provinces' opinion of grouping. The language of Section 19 allowed for such an interpretation but the League was given the assurance it wanted – "an assurance that had not however been made known to the Congress at the time".⁹⁹

Cripps again showed his inventiveness when, on June 23, Vallabhbhai communicated his concern that Congressmen desiring to enter the proposed Constituent Assembly were being asked to sign a nomination form that specifically accepted Para 19. The expert Cripps came up with an instant solution: alter the form's wording. He "quickly drafted a sentence on a piece of paper: 'Read "for the purposes of the declaration of May 16" in place of "for the purposes of Para 19 of the declaration of May 16"'.¹⁰⁰ After this "clarification" was repeated, in the Viceroy's presence, to the Mahatma – but not, of course, conveyed to the League –, a "much disquieted" Wavell¹⁰¹ wrote a note for his British colleagues:

*I am very concerned about this, since if my understanding is correct, I consider that there has either been a reversal of policy,...or that the assurance given to Mr Gandhi is not entirely an honest one.*¹⁰²

The Viceroy followed this up with a discussion with the Mission but his effort to retain the reference to Para 19 in the nomination form failed. As he wrote in his diary, "these politicians can always out-talk me, and I had to withdraw".¹⁰³

For a fleeting period Azad, Jawaharlal and C.R. seemed willing to accept all of the May 16 Plan, including Section 19 and compulsory grouping: Azad because it was an extension of his scheme; Nehru because he had more or less conceded Groups on May 6; and Rajaji because he wanted talking to end and self-government to commence.¹⁰⁴ Neither held nor expressed firmly, these opinions collapsed before Vallabhbhai's and the Mahatma's clear conviction that compulsory grouping was wrong and a stepping stone to Greater Pakistan. "The Cabinet Delegation cannot and should not coerce any province to go into a group against its own will," Vallabhbhai said in a letter early in June.¹⁰⁵

Delighted that Jinnah's "main demand of Pakistan is buried for ever" and that "his demand for parity is not accepted",¹⁰⁶ Patel would have at once accepted the May 16 Plan but for two things. One, it did not give a strong centre. Two, he did not know how to cope with Section 19. Assam's Congressmen were up in arms, and Vallabhbhai himself rebelled against the prospect of Assam being "overwhelmed".¹⁰⁷ He was less particular about the N.W.F.P., a Congress province no doubt but also, after all, a Muslim one.

Matters were made more difficult for Patel by a statement on May 25 by the Mission that grouping was "essential to the scheme" and that Congress's interpretation of optional grouping, drawn from Para 15, "does not accord with the Delegation's intentions".¹⁰⁸ But it accorded, Gandhi argued, with the Plan's language. An award or a law had to be understood from its text, not from the supposed intentions of its authors. This text said that "provinces should be free to form Groups". He strongly agreed with that. Vallabhbhai liked the Mahatma's stand and adopted it. "I have no doubt in my mind," he wrote to a Congress leader in Sind on June 12, "that according to the legal interpretation of the document the provinces are free to join or not to join even in the first instance."¹⁰⁹ But the weak centre continued to trouble him and he told Wavell on June 12 that "he was opposed to the May 16 Statement".¹¹⁰ However, Congress deferred a reply to the Raj. It wanted to see how Jinnah was going to respond – and it awaited the second half of the Mission's package, the proposal for an Interim Government.

To Congress and the League Wavell first proposed, on his and the Mission's behalf, a council of 12 – 5 Congressmen (including 1 scheduled caste), 5 Muslims from the League and 2 from other minorities. Congress rejected this out of hand. Neither the League nor the qaum was entitled to such an inflated representation. Gandhi had no doubt agreed to Congress-League parity at the time of the abortive Desai-Liaquat pact, but that was to obtain the WorCom's release. Neither he nor Congress accepted it as a principle. The Viceroy next offered a council of 13 – 5 Congress Hindus, 5 Muslims from the League, 1 Congress scheduled caste, 1 Sikh and 1 Indian Christian. Jinnah indicated acceptance but, as Patel told Wavell, the Congress WorCom "did not take five minutes to turn down the proposal,"¹¹¹ which implied that none but the League could represent Muslims and that Congress could speak for none but the Hindus. Then came the British Delegation's "award" announced on June 16, a council of 14 individuals who were named. They comprised 6 Congress Hindus (Nehru, Patel, Prasad, C. R., Mahtab and Jagjivan Ram), 5 League Muslims led by Jinnah; Baldev Singh as a Sikh, N. P. Engineer as a Parsi and John Matthai as a Christian.

The reduction in the League's proportionate strength was an improvement but Congress was still being treated as a Hindu body. The award was rejected but by no means instantly. The WorCom was tempted by the possibility of a 9-to-5 majority against the League: that the minorities would back Congress seemed a reasonable assumption. Offered as soon as he saw the June 16 award, Gandhi's predictable advice was to turn it down. The others were less sure.

Though seemingly most affected by a Congress Muslim's exclusion from the June 16 list, Azad not only did not object to it, he became in fact "the leader of the point of view" that Congress should not break on the question.¹¹² Azad's attitude was possibly linked to the fact that he was not going to lead Congress's team in the council: his term as Congress President was to end in the first week of July and Jawaharlal was going to take over. The succession and its timetable robbed the council of the charm it may have possessed for Azad. Believing that a majority of his colleagues were also ready to yield on the Congress Muslim issue, Azad, it would seem, informed the British Delegation that the WorCom "would not stick out on that point."¹¹³

Eager, impatient even, for power to be transferred from the Raj to Congress, Vallabhbhai also opposed Gandhi's advice at first.¹¹⁴ As keen as Patel on office acceptance, Rajaji backed him and informed the Mission that the WorCom was likely to accept the June 16 award.¹¹⁵ Vallabhbhai changed his mind, however, when, on the dawn of June 20, *The Statesman* published the contents of a letter from Jinnah to the Viceroy.

In his letter Jinnah raised three significant questions. If (asked Jinnah) either Jagjivan Ram or Matthai or Baldev Singh or Engineer was unwilling or unable to join the council, would he, Jinnah, be consulted before the Viceroy filled the vacancy? Secondly, was it open to Congress to substitute a Muslim for one of the Hindus on the June 16 list? Thirdly, would the League have a veto on every major communal issue? Through his first question Jinnah was claiming a say in the choice of a substitute for Jagjivan Ram, a Hindu, were the need for a substitute to arise. His second question was a bid for a Raj-League axis to blackball Congress Muslims and different from a waiver by Congress of its right to nominate a Muslim. The third question signified a bold attempt to convert a 5-to-9 minority into a majority.¹¹⁶

After this evidence of Jinnah's attitude, Patel felt that a coalition with him was not worth considering. Despite every urge to get his and Congress's hands on the levers of power, Vallabhbhai asked the WorCom to reject the June 16 offer, advice that became incontestable when, on June 22, two letters from Wavell were received. One, a response to a Congress query, admitted the truth of *The Statesman* report about Jinnah's questions and spelt out the Viceroy's answers, which conceded, to Patel's dismay, the validity of Jinnah's claims.¹¹⁷ Wavell's other letter referred to the request for a place for a Congress Muslim that Congress was likely to make but had not yet formally made, and added: "For reasons of which you are already aware, it is not possible for the Cabinet Mission or myself to accept this

request."¹¹⁸ Pyarelal noted that the Viceroy's letters "achieved what Bapu's persuasion had failed to do so far". When the WorCom voted on the June 16 offer, "all except one were opposed".¹¹⁹

This was on June 22 but the decision was not immediately conveyed to the Raj even though Wavell had earlier spoken of the "great deal of urgent work awaiting" the Cabinet Mission in London and asked for an "answer not later than June 23".¹²⁰ Congress's hesitation was connected with its inability to decide about the long-term plan. The League had accepted it on June 6. Following Wavell's assurances to Jinnah, it was also likely to accept the June 16 offer, which contained an important clause, drafted by Cripps and incorporated at his instance:

*In the event of the two major parties or either of them proving unwilling to join in the setting up of a coalition (as proposed), it is the intention of the Viceroy to proceed with the formation of an Interim Government which will be as representative as possible of those willing to accept the Statement of May 16th.*¹²¹

Why Cripps put this Clause 8 into the June 16 Statement is plain: he hoped that the prospect of office would induce acceptance of May 16. Vallabhbhai looked at this clause and saw that it assured the League a substantial role in the Interim Government. He looked at it again and realized that Congress too could earn such a role if it accepted May 16. He may have been assured that this was so when Sir B. N. Rau, a Raj official who had helped Cripps draft May 16,¹²² called privately on Patel on the morning of June 20.¹²³ In any case, at some time between the morning of June 20 and the early hours of June 23, and ahead of any of his colleagues, Vallabhbhai decided that May 16 had to be accepted, never mind its double-speak about Groups and the weak centre it envisaged, if June 16 was going to be rejected. Once in power, he and his colleagues would strengthen the centre. Moreover, acceptance of May 16, now the only route to power, would entitle Congress to demand a new list for an Interim Government.

Cripps, who had known this all the time, and Pethick-Lawrence were thinking along identical lines. From the night of June 22, over a crucial 48-hour period, there were several direct and indirect contacts between Patel on the one hand and Cripps and Pethick-Lawrence on the other. It is not clear whether the initiative for these contacts was Patel's or of the Britons or of the man who served as a go-between, Sudhir Ghosh, a young Bengali who had studied at Cambridge and made links with members of the British Labour Party. Ghosh has claimed that it was his: "I told Cripps and Pethick-Lawrence that the only advice I could give them about

salvaging something out of the wreckage was that they should have a private talk with Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, who was the only man amongst the Congress leaders who was a practical statesman."¹²⁴ Whoever initiated the consultation, it resulted in Congress accepting May 16. The diaries of Manibehn, Wavell and Pyarelal, the account of Ghosh and the Transfer of Power volumes enable us to reconstruct the events that took place between the night of June 22 and noon on June 25, when Congress's acceptance was conveyed to the Raj:

June 22: Ghosh turns up late in the evening at Birla House, where Vallabhbhai is staying. *June 23:* After his pre-dawn walk, Patel takes Gandhi (in one of Birla's cars) to a silent prayer organized by the Quakers. Pethick-Lawrence and Ghosh are also there. Vallabhbhai takes Gandhi back to the Bhangi Colony, lingers there for ten minutes and proceeds homewards. At the Gole Post Office his car is stopped by a hand raised by Ghosh from P.-L.'s car. Ghosh gets into Birla's car and Patel joins P.-L. in his. Both cars go to 2 Willingdon Crescent, the villa where P.-L., Cripps and Alexander stay.

Vallabhbhai and the three Britons talk from about 8 a.m. for half an hour. He has met them earlier as one of Congress's team but this is the first time he is seeing them on his own. He tells them that "the two letters received from the Viceroy had settled the matter" and Congress was going to reject June 16.¹²⁵ P.-L. asks Patel if he realizes that in that case Jinnah would be invited, under Clause 8, to help form a government. Vallabhbhai asks if Congress too would be invited to play that role if it accepted May 16. Cripps and P.-L. say that it would. Securing the crucial confirmation, Patel tells them – without authority yet with absolute certainty – that Congress will accept May 16.¹²⁶

The same day, 9.30 a.m.: At the Viceroy's house, a startled Wavell learns from P.-L. that Congress will reject June 16 but accept May 16. At Azad's residence, Vallabhbhai tells Jawaharlal, Azad, Prasad and C.R. that power was on the cards if May 16 is accepted. *Late afternoon:* A crisis. Telegrams from Assam and Bombay announce that candidates for the Constituent Assembly proposed under May 16 were being required to commit themselves to Para 19. Hitherto positive about May 16 Gandhi tells the WorCom that "the plan now stinks".¹²⁷

Still the same day, June 23, 9 p.m.: Ghosh calls on Patel at Birla House, goes to Cripps and returns to Vallabhbhai at 10.30 p.m. with Cripps's ingenious solution: "Read 'for the purposes of the declaration of May 16' instead of 'for the purposes of Para 19'." Patel is satisfied but would Gandhi accept it? *June 24, 7 a.m.:* Gandhi and Vallabhbhai meet P.-L., Cripps and Alexander at 2 Willingdon Crescent. P.-L. assures Gandhi and Patel that "if the Congress accepted the Statement of 16th may, they would put themselves on the level with the Muslim League in respect of the Interim

Government".¹²⁸ Gandhi brings up the protests from Assam and Bombay. Cripps presents his solution, but P.-L. intervenes and says, "No, that presents difficulty."¹²⁹

It is agreed that Gandhi and Patel will meet the three at 8 p.m. again that night, with Wavell also present. By the time the second meeting takes place, P.-L. has been persuaded to accept Cripps's solution. 8 p.m.: Vallabhbhai and Gandhi meet the four Britons at Viceroy's House. The Mahatma again raises the protests from Assam and Bombay, whereupon P.-L. assures him that Congress candidates to the Constituent Assembly do not have to accept compulsory grouping. Wavell intervenes and says that grouping is essential but P.-L., the leader of the British Delegation, asks Wavell "not to press the point."¹³⁰

"Are you satisfied?" Patel asks Gandhi after the interview. "On the contrary," says Gandhi, "my suspicion has deepened."¹³¹ Wavell's intervention was too plain to be missed. However, the Mahatma has grasped the strength of Vallabhbhai's feelings. The Cabinet Mission issues an elucidation that candidates to the Constituent Assembly are not "bound down in terms of Para 19"¹³² but Gandhi is unconvinced.

June 25, 8 a.m.: Sensing its mood, Gandhi tells the WorCom: "I admit defeat. I cannot advise you to accept the May 16 proposition.... But you should follow my intuition only if it appeals to your reason.... I shall now leave with your permission." There is a hush. Azad, "with his unfailing alertness," at once takes in the situation. "What do you desire?" he asks the WorCom. "Is there any need to detain Bapu further?"¹³³ No one says a thing. Gandhi gets up and leaves. At noon the WorCom sends its long-awaited answer to the Raj. June 16 is rejected but May 16 is accepted. Congress's letter recalls "our interpretation of some of the provisions of the May 16 Statement" – this is a reference to grouping – and adds: "while adhering to our views, we accept your proposals and are prepared to work them."¹³⁴

* * *

Wavell complained that the assurances to Gandhi and Patel were dishonest but, "out-talked" by Cripps and Pethick-Lawrence, he did not press his objection to Congress's acceptance. That there was a solid foundation for Wavell's unease and Gandhi's suspicion would become plain six months later, when HMG would state that mandatory Groups were what it had in mind all along, but in June the Mission's anxiety was to install a Congress-League coalition (a laudable aim) and leave (an understandable wish). Their keenness let Cripps and Pethick-Lawrence to say one thing to Congress and another to the League (a guarantee of future conflict). We can be sure

that Vallabhbhai, like Gandhi, sensed the hesitation in the Raj's assurances to Congress. He knew they were not solid but he did not want any probing at this juncture.

Patel to N. Vazirani, a Congress leader of Sind, 12.6.46: *I do not think it is wise to open up these matters (compulsory grouping and Para 19) at this stage. If we find the proposals otherwise satisfactory and the interim arrangement is made to our satisfaction, it would be wise to accept the proposals.*¹³⁵

Getting Congress into power and preventing the League from obtaining an inflated share of it were Vallabhbhai's principal goals. If a word from the Raj enabled him to move towards them, he would accept the word and move. He realized, of course, that the Raj had offered assurances of an opposite kind to the League. Given the gulf between Congress and the League, the Mission could succeed only by double-speak. When, in a few weeks and not entirely without truth, Jinnah alleged "a secret deal between Vallabhbhai Patel and the Cabinet Mission," Vallabhbhai retorted, "In fact it was Mr Jinnah who entered into a secret understanding."¹³⁶ When he said this, Patel may not have been aware of Wyatt's advice to Jinnah, or of the private assurance to the League on voting in a Section, but he knew of the Mission's keenness on the League's cooperation and may have been informed of some facts as well.

In a letter to Vallabhbhai, C.R. would concede that Congress's June 25 decision was "all due to your firm and thoughtful stand."¹³⁷ The Sardar had proven his independence and gone against Gandhi's instinct. Beause he gave a firm lead, the WorCom rejected Gandhi's advice. Wavell, though feeling that Vallabhbhai, in collusion with Cripps, had "outmanoeuvred" the Raj,¹³⁸ recognized Patel's strength and described it in a letter to King George VI.

Wavell to the King, 8.7.46: *Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel is the recognised 'tough' of the Congress Working Committee and by far the most forcible character amongst them.... He is probably the only one of them capable of standing up to Gandhi.*¹³⁹

As soon as he heard that Congress had said no to June 16 and yes to May 16, Jinnah sent word to Wavell that the League had accepted June 16 as well. He expected, in response, an invitation to form the Interim Government. Having consented to both plans himself, while Congress had agreed only to the long-term one and that too with reservations, Jinnah was certain that he would be sent for. He was not. Disliking "Congress manoeuvres," Wavell considered whether he could "ask Mr Jinnah to form a

Government" but concluded, "I do not see how this could possibly be done."¹⁴⁰ Cripps's Clause 8 – to which, ironically, Wavell had agreed in order to ensure that "Mr Jinnah, who had already accepted the Statement of May 16, [was] not put at a disadvantage with the Congress, who, had not"¹⁴¹ – now precluded an invitation to Jinnah alone, or ahead of an invitation to Congress.

Jinnah was furious. Thanks to his vigilance and tactics, a great prize had almost reached his hands. But at the last moment it vanished. He accused Congress of dishonesty, Cripps and Pethick-Lawrence of treachery and Wavell of betrayal. In his resentment Jinnah charged that Cripps had "debased his talents" and placed a "fantastic and dishonest construction" on Clause 8.¹⁴² This last charge was not valid. Clause 8 was quite clear. Yet Jinnah's rage was not groundless. After referring to grouping, on May 25, as "an essential feature" of their scheme, the British Delegation was now treating Congress's reply, which reiterated opposition to grouping, as acceptance. Patel's decisiveness and firmness, backed by Cripps's cleverness, prevented a Jinnah government, which three Indians out of four did not want. A wrong was avoided. Yet Jinnah felt wronged in the bargain. He would exact a heavy price.

After a gruelling stay of 97 summer days, the "three wise men" of the British cabinet left India on June 29. Wavell and Cripps did not say goodbye to each other.¹⁴³ Before leaving, the Mission told Congress and the League that the June 16 scheme was dead and that, both parties having accepted May 16, a new coalition scheme would be attempted after a short interval.

* * *

It was during this interval that Nehru took over from Azad and therefore became, when the Interim Government was installed, Prime Minister in effect, though formally designated Vice-President of the Viceroy's Executive Council. Since it was obvious that Azad's successor in Congress's chair would be India's first *de facto* Premier, the succession had agitated more than one heart. Azad wanted to be re-elected; awareness of this fact agonized Azad's close friend and colleague Jawaharlal, who had his expectations; and Vallabhbhai also was involved, for, apart from any personal hopes he may have harboured, several PCCs had nominated him. Kripalani, too, had been proposed.

April 29 was the last date for nominations. By April 20 Gandhi had indicated, privately at any rate, his preference: Jawaharlal. When a newspaper reported of the possibility of Azad's re-election, Gandhi wrote a frank letter to the Maulana whose Presidency had been

stretched to six years because of the war and the WorCom's imprisonment.

Gandhi to Azad, 20.4.46: *Please go through the enclosed cutting.... I have not spoken to anyone of my opinion. When one or two Working Committee members asked me, I said that it would not be right for the same President to continue.... If you are of the same opinion, it may be proper for you to issue a statement about the cutting and say that you have no intention to become President again.... In today's circumstances I would if asked prefer Jawaharlal. I have many reasons for this. Why go into them?*¹⁴⁴

If Gandhi had his reasons for wanting Jawaharlal, the party had its for wanting Patel, whom it saw, as Kripalani would afterwards say, as "a great executive, organizer and leader"¹⁴⁵ with his feet on the ground. The party was conscious, too, of the Sardar's successful Quit India exertions, not matched by Jawaharlal. In the first quarter of 1946, less than a year after the WorCom's release, Vallabhbhai's 1942 role was quite fresh even in the popular mind. Governed by these considerations, 12 of the 15 PCCs nominated Patel.

One of Gandhi's "many" reasons for favouring Nehru was publicly mentioned by him a year later. "Jawaharlal cannot be replaced today," the Mahatma said. "whilst the charge is being taken from Englishmen. He, a Harrow boy, a Cambridge graduate and a barrister, is wanted to carry on the negotiations with Englishmen."¹⁴⁶ Another was Nehru's rapport with at least a section of Muslims, contrasted with Vallabhbhai's disinclination to establish it. That "Jawahar will not take second place," "is better known abroad than Sardar" and "will make India play a role in international affairs" were additional considerations with the Mahatma.¹⁴⁷ Finally, Gandhi realized that Jawaharlal's selection would not deprive India of Patel's services and that the two would work as partners. "They will be like two oxen yoked to the governmental cart. One will need the other and both will pull together."¹⁴⁸

Though Gandhi knew whom he would recommend, the nomination of Jawaharlal almost missed the April 29 deadline. No PCC had proposed his name. "In deference," as he puts it, "to Gandhiji's wishes," Kripalani "sent a paper round, proposing the name of Jawaharlal"¹⁴⁹ during a WorCom meeting in New Delhi. According to Kripalani, "the members of the Working Committee signed it and also some local members of the AICC."¹⁵¹ This suggests that Vallabhbhai also signed Nehru's nomination.

¹ In all probability, Kripalani is referring to the two-hour WorCom session of April 25.¹⁵⁰

As soon as Nehru had been formally proposed, Kripalani withdrew his own nomination and handed Patel a fresh piece of paper with the latter's withdrawal written out on it. Vallabhbhai was pulling out, Kripalani's draft said, "so that Nehru could be elected unopposed."¹⁵² All it needed was Patel's signature. Vallabhbhai showed the sheet to Gandhi, who, despite his preference, gave Jawaharlal an opportunity to stand down in the Sardar's favour. "No PCC has put forward your name," the Mahatma said to Nehru, "only the Working Committee has." To this pregnant remark Jawaharlal responded with "complete silence."¹⁵³ Obtaining confirmation that "Jawahar will not take second place," Gandhi asked Patel to sign the statement that Kripalani had prepared. Vallabhbhai did so at once.¹⁵⁴ The exercise was nothing new. He had withdrawn in 1929, 1936, 1939....

Prasad was not the only person to complain that "Gandhi had once again sacrificed his trusted lieutenant for the sake of the glamorous Nehru."¹⁵⁵ But Patel did not protest. Nor did he defy the Mahatma. No doubt he realized that at his age – he would soon be 71 – he could not expect another opportunity to lead India's Government. For this reason, if not for any other, the Mahatma's preference must have wounded him. According to some who knew him at this time and later, the denial of Congress's Presidency in 1946 "rankled" in Vallabhbhai's spirit.¹⁵⁶ Disagreeing, others point out that the selection of Nehru did not affect Patel's involvement in Congress and governmental affairs.¹⁵⁷ The fact that Gandhi had given Jawaharlal a chance to withdraw may have softened the blow felt by Vallabhbhai. In any case he did not sulk. A week after Nehru was nominated, Patel was making everyone, including Gandhi, "laugh a lot."¹⁵⁸

According to Kripalani, "the Sardar did not like my intervention."¹⁵⁹ While this reaction revealed Patel's disappointment, the immediate removal of his own name showed his ability to resist the lure of rank. Besides, his reason supported Gandhi's advice, which he might otherwise have disregarded. Believing, like Gandhi, that Jawaharlal would either take the number one spot in government or stay out, Vallabhbhai also reckoned that whereas office was likely to moderate Nehru, rejection would drive him into opposition.¹⁶⁰ Patel shrank from precipitating such an outcome, which would bitterly divide India.

Azad's acceptance of Jawaharlal's nomination was tardier. Though the Maulana issued, on April 26, an appeal for Jawaharlal's election,¹⁶¹ he also announced, in a statement published on April 29, that he would remain President until November.¹⁶² This is not what happened. Unanimously elected in May, Jawaharlal took over from Azad when the AICC met in Bombay early in July. Had Azad remained President until November, he rather than Nehru would have received Wavell's letter of July 22, which invited the Congress President to lead the

Interim Government. It was Gandhi again who had thwarted Azad. As soon as he saw the Maulana's April 29 statement, he wrote to him that the announcement "does not seem proper."¹⁶³ "I did not expect," an injured Maulana replied, "that you would think that Congress is not safe in my hands."¹⁶⁴

Though Vallabhbhai would have become the Vice-President of the Executive Council in September 1946 had Gandhi backed his nomination for Congress's chair, it does not follow that he would have become free India's first Prime Minister. D. P. Mishra, one of Patel's staunchest supporters, has observed:

When we members of the Mahakoshal (the C.P.'s Hindi region) PCC preferred him (Patel) to Nehru as Congress President, we had no intention of depriving Nehru of future Premiership. The younger man had already been raised to the office of Congress President thrice, and we therefore thought it just and proper that Patel, the older man, should have at least a second chance.

*As regards the Premiership of free India, we had always a vague idea that having been declared as his successor by the Mahatma, Nehru was bound to occupy that exalted office at the dawn of freedom. We therefore showed no reaction when Patel withdrew from the contest at the instance of the Mahatma.*¹⁶⁵

* * *

Jawaharlal blundered at the start of his Presidency. On July 7 he announced to the AICC, which ratified the WorCom's acceptance of May 16, that "we are not bound by a single thing except that we have decided to go into the Constituent Assembly."¹⁶⁶ Three days later, at a press conference, he again said that Congress would be "completely unfettered by agreements."¹⁶⁷ Adding that "the central government was likely to be much stronger than what the Cabinet Mission envisaged," Nehru went on to comment on grouping:

*The big probability is,... [that] there will be no grouping. Obviously Section A (the Hindu-majority provinces) will decide against grouping. In betting language, there is a four-to-one chance of the N.W.F.P. deciding against grouping. Then Group B collapses. [As for Section C], I can say with every assurance and conviction that there is going to be finally no grouping there, because Assam will not tolerate it under any circumstances whatever.*¹⁶⁸

Jinnah was up in arms. Describing Nehru's remarks as "a complete repudiation..." of May 16, he asked HMG to "remove the impression

that the Congress has accepted the long-term scheme."¹⁶⁹ When the Raj declined to do this, Jinnah got the League to revoke its acceptance of May 16 and launch "direct action to achieve Pakistan."¹⁷⁰ On the day of the League's momentous decision, a Vallabhbhai still aghast at Jawaharlal's blunder wrote a letter that contains a candid yet sympathetic appraisal of Nehru and reveals a remarkably self-assured Patel.

Patel to D. P. Mishra, 29.7.46: *Though Nehru has been elected (President) for the fourth time, he often acts with childlike innocence...but we must not allow our anger to get the better of ourselves...His Press conference [was an] act of emotional insanity.*

But in spite of all his innocent indiscretions, he has unparalleled enthusiasm and a burning passion for freedom which make him restless and drive him to a pitch of impatience where he forgets himself... Opposition sometimes drives him mad, as he is impatient.

*You may, however, rest assured that as long as one of us is inside the group that governs the policy of the Congress, the straight and steady march of the ship will not be interrupted.*¹⁷¹

Though they triggered Jinnah's fierce reaction, the views that Jawaharlal had expressed were also held by Vallabhbhai, who had privately conveyed them to some of his friends.^{*} Yet the indiscretion was costly, Azad afterwards calling it, with exaggeration but not without some justification, "one of those unfortunate events which change the course of history."¹⁷² Asking the qaum to observe August 16 as Direct Action day, Jinnah said:

*Today we bid goodbye to constitutional methods. Throughout, the British and the Congress held a pistol in their hand, the one of authority and arms and the other of mass struggle and non-cooperation. Today we have also forged a pistol and are in a position to use it.*¹⁷³

This language did not go down well with Wavell, who only a week earlier had launched a fresh bid for a Congress-League coalition, offering Congress 6 seats and the League 5. Now, with the League rescinding its acceptance of May 16 and talking of pistols, Wavell was obliged, for the first time, to contemplate a government dominated by Congress. The Viceroy continued to harbour a grievance about "the

* E.g., Patel to Vazirani, 2.4.46: "I feel certain that the Muslims of Sind will not like to be ruled by Punjab...No province will be willing to sacrifice provincial autonomy. It is against human nature." (SPC 3, p.105)

dishonesty of Cripps and P.-L. in instigating Congress" to offer an "insincere acceptance"¹⁷⁴ of May 16, yet he had sent his proposal to Nehru and had no ground now for recalling it.

For a while it looked as if Jawaharlal would provide it. Making an issue of the Viceroy's role, and not satisfied with a statement from Wavell that Ministers will have "the greatest possible freedom in the exercise of the day to day administration of the country,"¹⁷⁵ he sought an explicit assurance that Wavell would function only as a figurehead. Congress, Nehru wrote to the Viceroy, would be "wholly unable to cooperate" without such an assurance.¹⁷⁶

But was Jawaharlal speaking for Congress? V. P. Menon, the Raj's Reforms Commissioner, suggested to Wavell that Patel's views should be ascertained. With the Viceroy's nod, H. V. R. Iengar, an official who had served the Bombay Government as Home Secretary and was known to Patel, flew to Bombay and informed the Sardar, late in the evening of August 2, that Nehru's stand on the Viceroy's role was likely to torpedo the Interim Government. Vallabhbhai asked his visitor to return the next day, by when, after several paces on the floor of the Marine Drive flat, Patel had made up his mind. Telling Iengar that if "Congress were asked to form an Interim Government he would insist that they should do so," he added that he would oppose a break on the question of the Viceroy's status and in fact "resign from the Working Committee if his view was not accepted."¹⁷⁷

Wavell's Journal shows that it was after encouraging word was received "from an unimpeachable source"¹⁷⁸ – the reference is to Iengar – that, on August 6, a formal offer was sent to Congress. Meeting in Wardha on August 8, the WorCom said yes to it even though the assurance that Nehru had demanded was not given. Vallabhbhai's conviction had prevailed once more. His success was not a matter of numbers, for the new WorCom, formed by Jawaharlal without consulting Patel, was different from preceding ones. Despite his role in Nehru's election, Kripalani had been replaced as party General Secretary by two persons named jointly to the post, B. V. Keskar and Mridula Sarabhai. Though for years she had been close to the Sardar and Manibehn, Mridula had developed a closer association with Jawaharlal. On questions such as socialism and the Hindu-Muslim tension she and Jawaharlal seemed to be on the same wavelength, which was not Vallabhbhai's. Her attitude, which during moments of stress they saw as a switch in loyalty, hurt Patel and his daughter.

A wish to quit the new WorCom was Vallabhbhai's first reaction but he knew that "to get out would be injuring our cause."¹⁷⁹ If the WorCom troubled him, so did the state of Congress as a whole. The decision to enter the Constituent Assembly envisioned in the May 16 plan had revealed the hidden ambitions of many supposedly selfless

Congressmen. Others were vain about the roles they had played. The reality was unattractive and even frightening. Patel used a favourite simile to describe it.

To Mishra, 29.7.46: *The mad race for going into the Constituent Assembly has caused Gandhiji considerable pain and he has come out with his heart's agony in an article in which he compares these people's jailgoing with that of thieves and robbers.*

The underground variety of Congressmen, who call themselves Augusters, think they created the August revolution. Like a dog walking under a fully loaded cart, they feel that they dragged the whole cart.

*This situation is full of perplexities and difficulties, but seasoned soldiers have to hold their feet firmly and tightly on the ground.*¹⁸⁰

Congress and its WorCom might have altered in this way and that but when Vallabhbhai held his ground they came round. Patel was sworn in on September 2. That morning, along with Prasad, Sarat Bose and Jagjivan Ram, he went to Bhangi Colony and, for perhaps the first and last time in his life, touched the Mahatma's feet. One of Gandhi's aides, Rajkumari Amrit Kaur, garlanded the Sardar with a wreath of thread spun by the Mahatma.¹⁸¹

Jawaharlal was at the head of the team of twelve Ministers but he and Vallabhbhai had jointly selected them. Gandhi was kept informed but not consulted.¹⁸² Seven of the twelve were Congressmen: Prasad, C. R., Sarat Bose, Asaf Ali, Jagjivan Ram, Patel and Nehru. Two non-Congress Muslims, Ali Zaheer and Shafaat Ahmed Khan, and three minority representatives – Baldev Singh, John Matthai and C. H. Bhabha, a Parsi* – completed the list. While Jawaharlal kept the External Affairs portfolio, Vallabhbhai took Home and Information & Broadcasting.

Three days after being sworn in, Vallabhbhai broke Congress's boycott of the Raj's social occasions and accepted an invitation to dine

* Azad writes in *India Wins Freedom* (1988 edition, pp. 174-5): "I had pressed strongly for the inclusion of a Parsee.... After some discussion my colleagues agreed. Since the Parsee community was concentrated in Bombay, we left the choice to Sardar Patel.... He suggested the name of Mr C. H. Bhabha. We later found that Mr Bhabha was a friend of Sardar Patel's son and could not by any means be regarded as a leader of the Parsee community." While it is probable that Dahyabhai introduced Bhabha to his father – Bhabha was a director of the insurance company for which Dahyabhai worked –, Azad's comment is not unconnected with the thwarting of his hope that a Parsee's inclusion would weaken Patel's position in the Cabinet. "Nobody had heard of this Mr Bhabha.... But Mr Azad should have admired Mr Patel for the skilled craftsmanship with which he turned a matter of personal disadvantage into one of gain." (Rammanohar Lohia in his *Guilty Men of India's Partition*, p.44)

with the King's Representative and Lady Wavell. The Raj's acceptance of a national Government had removed the boycott's *raison d'être*. Afterwards Wavell wrote in his diary that Patel "is certainly the most impressive of the Congress leaders and has the best balance."¹⁸³ The Viceroy and Patel were both mature generals capable of looking at the past with detachment and even amusement. "How are you getting on at the D.I.B.?" Wavell asked, referring to the wing of the Raj that monitored the thoughts and actions of Congress's leaders and maintained dossiers on them. "Quite all right," the Sardar replied, "they have destroyed all the compromising papers." "Yes", the Viceroy rejoined, "I told them to make sure of that." Vallabhbhai laughed.¹⁸⁵

When Wavell expressed his hope that the League would enter the Government and the Constituent Assembly, Patel said that Jinnah was an impossible personality to negotiate with. The Viceroy asked whether Congress could not satisfy the League. Not if it meant the merger of an unwilling Assam into a Muslim Group, replied Patel. He would agree, Vallabhbhai said, to the representatives of Assam and Bengal meeting together in Section C to decide about a Group, which is what Para 19 laid down, provided Assam and Bengal had a vote each. Wavell commented that "this was entirely contrary to the intentions of the Mission" but did not add that the Raj had already assured the League that grouping would be decided by a simple majority in the Sections, each member having a vote. In other words, Bengal could vote Assam into a Muslim Group.¹⁸⁶

Meanwhile, on August 16, the League had observed Direct Action day. It rocked Calcutta, the capital of Bengal, where H. S. Suhrawardy headed a League-dominated coalition. There was murder, arson, rape and looting. *The Statesman*, which had defended Jinnah in his dispute with Wavell, referred to "the appalling carnage, the worst communal riot in India's history" and said that a League rally had touched it off.¹⁸⁷ If Suhrawardy's Ministry ignored the killing, Hindu groups soon gained ascendancy in it. In a letter to C.R., Patel spoke of "a good lesson for the League, because I hear that the proportion of Muslims who have suffered death is much larger."¹⁸⁸

Buttressed by Calcutta in his view that the League had to be brought into Government, Wavell raised the question with Nehru, who consulted Vallabhbhai. The Viceroy was told that it was up to Congress to meet Jinnah or try to persuade him:¹⁸⁹ the task did not belong to the Viceroy. Wavell returned to the theme in subsequent

* Five months later, Harold Macmillan, a future British Premier, told Wavell after seeing "most of the Indian political leaders" that he had found Nehru "charming but nervy" and "recognized in Patel much greater qualities of leadership."¹⁸⁴

interviews with Jawaharlal, who finally gave in. "In the end he said," Wavell noted in his diary, "'If you want to see Jinnah, I can't prevent you.'"¹⁹⁰ Offered in a moment of weakness, Nehru's consent shocked Patel,¹⁹¹ but the latter is not entirely free himself of some responsibility for the League's subsequent entry into the Government. An indirect remark by him that he hoped to be able to suppress the League added to Wavell's keenness to bring the League in.¹⁹² And when, following Wavell's talk with Jinnah, the League entered the Government without rescinding its rejection of May 16, Vallabhbhai's protest was weak. He was handicapped by the reservations with which he and the Congress had agreed to May 16.

Despite Patel's dislike and complaint, the League came in, doubtless enabling Wavell to feel that Cripps's intrigue with Congress had been avenged. And despite Jinnah's dislike and complaint, a Congress Muslim, Asaf Ali, remained in the Government. Sarat Bose, Ali Zaheer and Shafaat Ahmed Khan vacated their places, and five Leaguers became ministers. To everyone's surprise, one of them was a Scheduled Caste Hindu, Jogendra Nath Mandal from Bengal. Unprepared to be ranked below Nehru, Jinnah kept himself out but nominated Mandal in revenge for Congress's retention of Asaf Ali.

Vallabhbhai and Nehru did not threaten resignation when Wavell told them that he was admitting the League without its acceptance of May 16. Why resign when the majority was still theirs? But Patel made it plain that he would leave if Home was taken away from him. Wavell insisted that it should go to the League. "I have decided," he wrote to Nehru.¹⁹³ Repeating that Vallabhbhai would resign, Jawaharlal added, "We are in full agreement with Sardar Patel in this matter and we cannot continue in Government without him."¹⁹⁴ The soldier-Viceroy yielded and Home remained with Vallabhbhai, but another key portfolio, Finance, was handed over to the League and taken by Liaquat Ali.

The victory over Home did not satisfy Gandhi, who said that the nomination of a Hindu Harijan by an avowedly Muslim party proved that "their whole mode of entering into the Cabinet had not been straight".¹⁹⁵ Sadly for Hindu-Muslim relations, the League on its part felt that Congress's entry had not been straight either. From October 15, the day the League joined, the coalition was a house at war.

Patel had earlier warned Wavell that "Jinnah would only use his position in the Interim Government for purely communal and disruptive purposes and to break up India".¹⁹⁶ Wavell responded with an undertaking: "You can trust me to see," the Viceroy said, "that any attempt by Jinnah or either party to make the Interim Government a battleground for communal politics instead of an instrument for administering India would be prevented."¹⁹⁷

The Viceroy's word was not fulfilled. Patel's fears were. Ghazanfar Ali Khan, one of the League nominees, frankly said that they were entering Government "to get a foothold to fight for our cherished goal of Pakistan".¹⁹⁸ Not accepting Nehru as the Cabinet's leader, the League Ministers would meet informally under Liaquat's chairmanship and formally, along with their Congress colleagues, under Wavell's. The vexation they caused was more than psychological. Departments controlled by the League became, or were seen as, "entrenched Muslim camps".¹⁹⁹

The scene in the countryside was worse. Early in October, about 300 Hindus had been killed in Noakhali district in eastern Bengal. Temples were destroyed, women raped and many Hindus forcibly converted to Islam. Recognizing the independence that Vallabhbhai (and Jawaharlal) had asserted, and drawn by the cries from east Bengal, Gandhi went on a long walking tour of Noakhali to instil courage among the district's Hindus and tolerance among its Muslims. Patel asked for a Cabinet discussion on Noakhali and also for central takeover of the affected areas. Both demands were rejected by Wavell. Vallabhbhai "got a little heated" but knew that not every battle could be won.²⁰⁰

Exploiting the tales of woe that Hindu refugees brought from Noakhali, trouble-makers in Bihar launched a massacre of Muslims. Around 7,000 were killed, and the League unsuccessfully demanded central rule and martial law in Bihar. In a rare and unexpected show of common concern, Patel, Nehru, Liaquat and Nishtar (another of the League Ministers) flew together to Bihar. Surprised by this initiative, Wavell saw Vallabhbhai and Liaquat on their return from Patna and observed that "they seemed still on friendly terms".²⁰¹ Jawaharlal stayed longer in Bihar and "threatened harsh punishment unless the killing ceased",²⁰² but Patel's foray into Bihar in the company of Liaquat and Nishtar is also noteworthy. The Bihar carnage was sadly followed by the killing on November 8 of about a thousand Muslims at Garhmukteshwar in western U.P.

* * *

Despite pleas from Vallabhbhai and Nehru, Azad had stayed out of the Cabinet. "I'd rather be Congress President," he told Patel.²⁰³ Nehru vacated the party chair after entering the Government but it was filled by Kripalani, not Azad. The Maulana's name was proposed by one or two PCCs and he was not without hopes as he probed the ground. However, according to Vidya Shankar, a young ICS officer who joined the Sardar as his private secretary, Vallabhbhai "pulled strings in different parts of the country to forestall and checkmate the Maulana's attempt"²⁰⁴ and Azad withdrew his name.

We have seen the strains in the Patel-Azad relationship. Envisaging difficulty and interference if Azad became party President, Vallabhbhai successfully backed Kripalani's candidacy, forgetting, in the process, Kripalani's role in Nehru's elevation. Azad's move was foiled but Kripalani was not as content in Congress's chair as Patel may have hoped. He was glad, Kripalani said, that "our representatives and leaders have broken into the citadel of power",²⁰⁵ but the party President's influence was declining for that very reason. A chagrined Kripalani would complain afterwards that the "cooperation" he had expected from Vallabhbhai and Nehru was "missing in practice".²⁰⁶ As for Azad, he joined the Cabinet in January 1947, filling a vacancy caused by Asaf Ali's appointment as ambassador to Washington.

The Home Member of the Viceroy's Executive Council was entitled to one of the Raj's official residences. Patel was offered a choice between a house on Clive Road and another on Aurangzeb Road. It is appropriate that we find the three names together. As a ruler of India, Vallabhbhai belongs to Aurangzeb's and Clive's column; as a foe of alien domination he stands right against them. After consulting Manibehn he chose 1 Aurangzeb Road. Jawaharlal had taken a house round the corner on York Road. Putting heads together was easy and happened almost every evening. Generally it was a case of Jawaharlal walking over.

1 Aurangzeb Road was a round house with a wide lawn surrounding it and a courtyard within. A series of rooms – entrance, bed, living and office – ran round the inner space and formed a circle. The Government supplied a gardener, a couple of servants and a guard in civilian clothes. Vallabhbhai moved into his new house with Manibehn in October 1946, a month after taking office. Until then Birla House had been their Delhi home.

The new role brought new associates. Britons and Indians manning the structure of the Raj, including several involved in sending Congressmen to jail, were now Patel's subordinates, pledged to do his bidding. He worked with and through them, forgiving and forgetting the past. Most of the officials forgot it too. What mattered to Vallabhbhai now was their capacity to help and, if handled unwisely, to harm.

He did not forget his associates in Congress and the freedom struggle, the men with whom, for almost 30 years, he had shared ashrams, prisons, hopes and disappointments. But his day was now filled by new tasks and spent in new surroundings with new colleagues. The change was not as drastic or dramatic as the one that had occurred when he decided to plunge into Gandhi's battles; but it was unmistakable. His old life and the new merge in an

account by General Roy Bucher, then officiating G.O.C.-in-C., Eastern Command, of a meeting with Patel "towards the end of 1946". Evidently the Sardar had heard that the Raj had not permitted Bucher to accept an invitation from Gandhi.

*I went along to the Sardar's residence and was shown into his sitting-room. He greeted me with: "As you would not take tea with the Commander-in-Chief of all the Indians, you are going to look at him while you have tea with me." Thereupon he went out of the room and returned with a large photograph of Mahatma Gandhi which he placed on a table before me.*²⁰⁷

An immediate need was for a confidential aide who could draft important letters and speeches. Patel invited the man who had played this role during the Bardoli struggle and at the Karachi Congress, Swami Anand, but the latter answered that he had renounced worldly affairs. Consulted by the Sardar, Morarji Desai, who was Home Minister in Bombay, suggested Vidya Shankar. After cross-examining him for 90 minutes, an exercise in which Manibehn and G. D. Birla assisted Vallabhbhai, he accepted Shankar. Efficient in implementing Patel's instructions and quick in grasping his hints, the young officer was also a good draftsman.

While Shankar's services were valuable, a more significant role was played by Vapal Pangunni Menon. Though not a member of the ICS – he had in fact begun government service as a clerk –, Menon had risen by sheer merit to the office of the Viceroy's Reforms Commissioner and knew the mind and at times the intentions of the Raj. We noted his initiative in August 1946 to ascertain the attitude of Patel, then in Bombay, towards office acceptance. To that month can be dated the start of the Patel-Menon understanding which in two years would enable Vallabhbhai to clinch the transfer of power from Britain to India, the division of India into India and Pakistan, and the merger of princely states into India. Not yet assigned to any of Patel's departments, Menon enters Manibehn's diary from October 1946. Another official with whom Vallabhbhai found an immediate rapport was Hirubhai M. Patel, ICS, also destined to play a key role in some of the great and sad events of 1947.

The Constituent Assembly visualized by May 16 had been formed in the autumn of 1946 but did not meet until December. Jinnah followed up his rejection of May 16 by ordering League members of the Assembly to boycott it. Every few days Vallabhbhai and Nehru asked Wavell to obtain the League's acceptance of May 16. In turn the League demanded Congress's consent to compulsory grouping. HMG's response was to invite Wavell and five Indian leaders – Nehru,

Patel, Jinnah, Liaquat and Baldev Singh – for talks in London. Refusing to go, Patel urged Jawaharlal also to decline, but a personal appeal from Attlee induced Nehru to join the discussions. The outcome was a victory for the League.

HMG declared that Section C, Bengal in other words, could vote Assam into a Muslim Group even if Assam wanted to stay out; and that Sind and the N.W.F.P. could likewise be compelled to join the Group dominated by Punjab. The Raj's doublespeak had finally ended, as one day it had to, and it had ended in Jinnah's favour. The assurance that Cripps and Pethick-Lawrence had given to Vallabhbhai and Gandhi were meant only to bring Congress into the Government and into the Constituent Assembly; they did not mean that the Raj had accepted Congress's interpretation of grouping.

Vallabhbhai had known this all along, which is why he avoided the London talks. "From the start their (the Raj's) interpretation was different," he wrote after the decision was announced to Gandhi, who was in Noakhali.²⁰⁸ The remark reveals that he had known in the fourth week of June, while strongly urging the WorCom to accept May 16, that the Raj would eventually reject Congress's interpretation. Like Cripps and Pethick-Lawrence, he wanted Congress in office. A letter he wrote to Cripps after the award breathes indignation but not shock. We may note that it was not sent until nine days after the declaration.

*Patel to Cripps, 15.12.46: You know when Gandhiji was strongly against our settlement, I threw my weight in favour of it. You have created a very unfavourable situation for me. All of us here feel that there has been a betrayal.... Your interpretation means that Bengal Muslims can draw the constitution of Assam.... Do you think that such a monstrous proposition can be accepted by the Hindus of Assam?*²⁰⁹

"I didn't go," Vallabhbhai told Gandhi. "He (Nehru) shouldn't have gone either. But he didn't listen. Now he has come back with a defeat."²¹⁰ By not going Nehru might have postponed the defeat but neither he nor Patel was in a position to prevent it.

Vallabhbhai "took a very serious view"²¹¹ of the last paragraph of the London declaration, wherein HMG stated that no constitution framed by a Constituent Assembly in which "a large section of the Indian population had not been represented" would be forced upon "any unwilling parts of the country".²¹² In Patel's opinion, which he conveyed on December 10 to Colville, the acting Viceroy, this encouragement of Pakistan was "a betrayal" and a reversal of Attlee's word of March 1946 that "we cannot allow a minority to place

a veto on the advance of the majority''. In any case, said Vallabhbhai, if Britain really wanted to leave India, HMG "should name a date" of departure. "Jinnah would then be bound to compromise." Patel suggested January 1, 1948.²¹³

Was Gandhi hurt by Vallabhbhai's independence? Even if he was, and even if Patel resented Gandhi's preference for Nehru, neither was going to let the relationship break. It was put to strain, however, by their different attitudes to the prospect of power. Vallabhbhai had lost patience with Gandhi when negotiations with Cripps and Pethick-Lawrence were at a crucial stage, and it seemed to him that by being fussy, if not a spoilsport, Gandhi was likely to wreck them.²¹⁴ What Patel said on losing patience is not known. Two or three days after this incident, which occurred on June 24, Gandhi said something that Vallabhbhai did not like, to which Patel made a response that the Mahatma did not like. Again we have no knowledge of the actual remarks or their subject but they sparked correspondence:

Gandhi to Patel, 1.7.46: *It is nobody's fault. What can you or I do about it? You go by your own experience and I by mine. You know I have been at a loss to understand some of the things you have done.... Then again I do not like the way you lose your temper in the Working Committee. On top of it came the question of the Constituent Assembly (the May 16 Plan). This is not by way of complaint but I see that we are drifting in different directions.*

Patel to Gandhi, 2.7.46: *I do not want to take a path different from yours....If I did speak with some heat in the Committee, it was due to a defect in my temperament. This does happen occasionally with Jawaharlal.*²¹⁵

Pyarelal, the Mahatma's secretary, had also raised with Vallabhbhai his end-June exchange with Gandhi.

Patel to Pyarelal, 2.7.46: *Received your letter. What I feel I told Bapu straight off. On that question there's nothing more to think about. It is sad that this time I could not understand Bapu's thoughts. I found the atmosphere (around the Mahatma at Bhangi Colony) full of mistrust. I missed Mahadev. Several things would have got clarified if he had been there.*

*I no longer have my earlier energy and too many comings and goings are beyond me. I would go there to talk but, finding others present, return without saying a thing.*²¹⁶

The suggestion that meetings between Vallabhbhai and Gandhi were prevented by factors beyond their control is not convincing.

Patel would have asked for time if he really wanted to meet Gandhi, and if the Mahatma, on his part, was anxious to meet Vallabhbhai, he would have dismissed the others on Patel's arrival. The truth is that Vallabhbhai was less keen than before to seek Gandhi's political advice and the Mahatma more reluctant than before to offer it. The Patel-Gandhi disagreement of June 1946, and the Patel-Cripps understanding of the same period, should be contrasted with Vallabhbhai's statement to the WorCom in April 1942: "Cripps is a clever fellow.... I have placed myself in the hands of Gandhiji. I feel that he is instinctively right."

When Gandhi secluded himself in Noakhali, the Sardar could justifiably say that consulting him was virtually impossible.

Patel to Gandhi, 9.12.46: *It is hard to tell when we are going to meet next. You cannot get out of where you are; we cannot leave where we are.... The newspapers said that Pyarelal was ill. For the rest, it seems as if you have gone to another country.*²¹⁷

The Vallabhbhai-Nehru relationship was also being tested. At Congress's annual session, held in Meerut towards the end of November, Nehru had unexpectedly declared that the Congress Ministers were likely to resign.²¹⁸ This being neither agreed policy nor his wish, Patel decided that a public correction was called for. A few days after Nehru's impulsive utterance, speaking in Bombay to "an immense crowd on the sands", Vallabhbhai said that "Congress has no intention of quitting office". Then he added a sentence every bit as impulsive as Nehru's had been. "Even if all my other colleagues leave their posts, I shall stick on."²¹⁹

Nehru, on his part, seems to have objected to some of Patel's Meerut remarks. Addressing the advocates of Pakistan, Vallabhbhai had said: "Whatever you do, do it by the method of peace and love. You may succeed. But the sword will be met by the sword."²²⁰ Cheers greeted the statement, which was not exceptionable in itself, but it was unseasonable. The Noakhali and Bihar killings were not even a month old when Vallabhbhai made it.

The indiscretion was reported to Gandhi when Nehru and Kripalani journeyed to a Noakhali village to meet him. Whether it was Nehru or someone else who complained is not known for certain – Vallabhbhai, we shall see, made his guess –, but Gandhi's letter about it was written while Nehru was with him and sent by Jawaharlal's hand. Patel was not well at all when he received it. "After reading the letter Father was sad all day," Manibehn recorded.¹²¹

Like other recent letters from Gandhi, this one began with "Chiranjeev Vallabhbhai" – the form employed for a son and one that

the Mahatma had throughout used with Nehru –, a departure from the “Bhai Vallabhbhai” – “Brother Vallabhbhai” – of all the preceding years.

Gandhi to Patel, 30.12.46, 5.15 a.m.: *I heard of many complaints against you: Your speeches are inflammatory and play to the gallery. You make no distinction between violence and non-violence. You are teaching the people to meet the sword by the sword. All this is very harmful if true...*

They say you talk about sticking to office. That again is disturbing, if true. Whatever I heard I have passed on... If we stray from the strait and narrow path we are done for.

The Working Committee does not function harmoniously as it should. Root out corruption; you know how to do it.

*There is no need whatever for you to come. You are no longer fit to run about.*²²²

It was some days before Vallabhbhai replied.

Patel to Gandhi, 7.1.47: *The charge that I want to stick to office is a fabrication. Jawaharlal now and then hurls idle threats of resigning. I objected to it.... Repetition of empty threats has only resulted in loss of face before the Viceroy.*

It is news to me that my speeches are made with an eye to the gallery. In fact my habit is to tell unpalatable truths. At the time of the naval mutiny I displeased many by my blunt condemnation.

The remark about meeting violence with violence has been torn out of a long passage and presented out of context.

Mridula must have made these complaints, for she has made it her business to run me down.... I am tired of her doings.... She cannot stand it if anyone disagrees with Jawaharlal.

*The differences in the Working Committee are nothing recent.... If it is one of my colleagues who has complained I should like to know! None of them has said a thing to me.*²²³

* * *

The Constituent Assembly held its inaugural session on December 9, three days after HMG's London award. A little less than half its seats were vacant: the League stayed away and the rulers of princely states, eager to retain the option of independence, did not fill the 93 seats allotted to them. There was inducement for aloofness in the London award, which, as we have seen, had declared that the Assembly's decisions would not be forced upon “any unwilling parts

of the country". With this sentence HMG had implicitly conceded Pakistan and free princely states, yet Congress could not remain in the Assembly or the Government if it rejected the award. From Noakhali Gandhi proposed rejection but Patel and Jawaharlal turned down the advice.²²⁴

As for HMG's acceptance of coercive grouping, Congress affirmed that while it accepted the Raj's award, all those placed without their consent in a Muslim Section – Assembly members from Assam, the N.W.F.P., East Punjab and West Bengal and the Sikh community – were free to act as they saw fit. If the League boycotted the Union, others would boycott the Groups, even though Congress as such acquiesced in them.

Jinnah attacked Congress's "jugglery of words"²²⁵ and demanded the Assembly's dismissal. However, despite the London award, he refused to say yes to May 16, whereupon Vallabhbhai and Nehru insisted on the League Ministers' expulsion. When Wavell refused to order it, Nehru, Patel and seven other Ministers told him that they would resign. "Unless the League goes out, we will go out," Vallabhbhai told the Press.²²⁶ But he and his colleagues changed their minds on February 20 when Attlee announced that Britain would quit India not later than June 1948, handing over "to some form of central government or in some areas to the existing provincial governments" or "in such other way as may seem most reasonable". Attlee added that Mountbatten would replace Wavell.²²⁷

The announcement of freedom in 16 months thrilled Indians, and a fixed date of Britain's departure is what Patel had asked for, but partition was clearly hinted at in Attlee's words. "This may lead to Pakistan for those provinces or portions which may want it," Gandhi wrote to Jawaharlal.²²⁸ Vallabhbhai too understood the implication. However, unlike Gandhi, he was not miserable about it. About two months earlier – "late in December 1946 or early in January 1947"²²⁹ –, Menon had outlined to him a scheme for transfer of power on the basis of partition and Dominion status, and Patel had responded with approval. This was a considerable change, for as late as December 15 he had referred to Pakistan as Jinnah's "mad dream" and reacted with indignation to any suggestion that Congress might "agree to help him" in realizing it.²³⁰ About two weeks later – Menon does not give the exact date –, Vallabhbhai was willing to see India divided.

Manibehn's diary tells us that Menon called on her father on December 25 and 28 and again, successively, on January 3, 4 and 5. His conversion to Pakistan must have occurred on one of these dates. The present author's conclusion is that it took place on Christmas Day, when Patel and Menon met during the morning's fresh hours. Since

the letter from the Mahatma that saddened Vallabhbhai "all day" arrived on January 2, it is tempting to speculate that a hurt Patel was persuaded by Menon on January 3, but their meeting that day was a brief affair in the afternoon. Considering, moreover, that Vallabhbhai was quite ill throughout the first week of January, and in the light of Menon's testimony that after Patel expressed his consent he, Menon, "dictated the outline of a plan" in the Sardar's presence,²³¹ we are probably right in fixing December 25, 1946 as the date of the change.

Menon has recounted the arguments he used. Firstly, "it was better that the country should be divided rather than that it should gravitate towards civil war." Secondly, by consenting to Dominion status, Congress would gain British goodwill which would help in bringing the princes round. It would also fetch the cooperation of the Britons who commanded the army, navy and air force in India. Thirdly, while the three-tier Mission Plan was unworkable, severance of the Pakistan area would enable the emergence of "a strong central Government" over residuary India. Finally, once Pakistan was given to it, the League would lose its capacity to obstruct Congress in the rest of India and Congress would be free to abolish the separate Muslim electorate.

The logic was compelling but Vallabhbhai did not need to be persuaded. The experience of "coalition" with the League had disgusted him and the possibility of the Raj extending its rule to keep the peace in India or under that pretext infuriated him. Pakistan might be Jinnah's "mad dream" but governing India alongside the League was Patel's nightmare. He had ridiculed and fought the Pakistan idea, it was unpalatable, but was it not also a way out of the unbearable? Why not let Jinnah depart with his truncated Pakistan, leaving everyone else in peace? As soon as Menon had spelt out his solution, Vallabhbhai said that "he for one would use his influence to see that Congress accepted it".²³² The scheme was sent, with Wavell's knowledge, to the Secretary of State in London, and though Menon "could not very well convey that Patel had agreed", he did say that "he had reason to believe that Congress would accept" the scheme.²³³

Patel saw, too, that the scheme had the potential to remove the Raj's props to Indian foes of Congress. Six weeks earlier he had heard that the Nizam of Hyderabad was negotiating mining and railway franchises in Bastar, a princely state rich in iron, water and wood, with its British administrator, Bastar's ruler being a minor at the time. To Vallabhbhai this seemed a Raj-blessed effort for "Bastar state to be ceded to the Nizam".²³⁴ Such attempts would cease if Congress secured the Raj's goodwill.

A truncated Pakistan was indirectly conceded as a remedy by Ghanshyamdas Birla in letters that he wrote to Cripps on December 12 and 15, and in another letter he sent to Alexander on December

16.²³⁵ On December 18 Birla told Colville, the acting Viceroy, that "he thought that some sort of Pakistan would come about".²³⁶ Birla must have talked over his views with the Sardar, whose early morning walks he frequently joined. Manibehn's diary for December 1946 records several occasions when her father and Birla were together, which suggests that Birla may have contributed to Patel's new thinking before the Christmas Day interview with Menon, when it was crystallized.²³⁷

Sir Norman Smith, chief of the Raj's intelligence, told Vallabhbhai in the last week of January that if Congress wished to prevent "the loss of North-West India" it should show the League "great generosity" and make "an offer, if necessary, of one over parity" – seven League seats in the Council against Congress's six. Only such a "psychological approach", Smith said, would, "dissolve the psychological mistrust". Patel, who as Home Minister was Smith's boss, answered:

*If you think that generosity will placate the Muslim Oliver Twist, then you do not understand either the Muslim mind or the situation.*²³⁸

The retort silenced Smith. It also showed that Vallabhbhai was now mentally resigned to "the loss of N.W. India". Jinnah, on his side, was getting reconciled to Smaller Pakistan. Telling Wavell, on November 19, that the Muslims had to have "their own bit of country", Jinnah had added, "Let it be as small as you like. But it must be our own."²³⁹ The third party was reaching the same conclusion. The India and Burma Committee of the British Cabinet noted, on December 11, the "pressure of events" that were "leading to the establishment of some form of Pakistan";²⁴⁰ and in a letter to Attlee on January 1, Ernest Bevin, Britain's Foreign Secretary, referred to "handing over to established governments in India."²⁴¹ Nearly five weeks before Mountbatten's arrival, Patel told Wavell that he was "quite prepared" for a Pakistan comprising West Punjab, Sind and the N.W.F.P. – if the latter two provinces "wished to join" – and Eastern Bengal.²⁴² It would take several months and savage riots to translate this coincidence of private opinion into public agreement.

Since Wavell's daughter Felicity was to be married on February 20, the announcement that he would be replaced was withheld until the evening of that day. Jawaharlal, Azad and C.R. farewelled Wavell in positive or warm terms – Nehru consoled him with the thought that "some failures were greater than successes"²⁴³ – but Vallabhbhai refrained from offering any praise. Though the comment that Patel and Wavell "respected each other and in matters of business got on

well together'' is probably true,²⁴⁴ the Sardar could not forget the contrast between the suppression over the years of Congress's protest movements and Wavell's reward of five ministerial berths to the League following its Direct Action.

Patel to Cripps, 15.12.46: *If strong action had been taken, or allowed to be taken, when Direct Action Day was fixed by the Muslim League,... all this colossal loss of life and property and blood-curdling events would not have happened. The Viceroy here took the contrary view and every action of his since the Great Calcutta Killing has been in the direction of encouraging the Muslim League and putting pressure on us towards appeasement.*²⁴⁵

Jinnah too had his disputes with Wavell. Even so, the tone of the Viceroy's *Journal* confirms Vallabhbhai's charge. Wavell's sympathies were with the League, which, however, is not surprising when we recall that Congress launched the '42 movement when the War was on and Wavell was C.-in-C. In his last meeting with Wavell, Patel "very hotly" attacked²⁴⁶ a clever budget that Liaquat had introduced, proposing a stiff business profits tax and tall income tax rates for the higher slabs, which drove a wedge between businessmen and the Government. Jawaharlal did not like Liaquat's proposals either but his avowals of socialism cramped his criticism. Leading the battle against the proposals, Vallabhbhai had them modified with some help from Wavell.

The deadline for Britain's departure and Attlee's word that power might go directly to provincial governments triggered a struggle for their control. The League dominated the Bengal Ministry and was in undisputed possession, following fresh elections, of the Sind government. It could count on Baluchistan. But Pakistan's centrepiece, Punjab, was in the hands of a coalition of the League's foes; and Congress was in charge in two other provinces that the League sought, the N.W.F.P. and Assam.

The League organized mass movements to topple these three governments. Failing wholly in Asam, it gained a crucial psychological success in the N.W.F.P. The Congress Ministry could not be deposed but the cry of Islam-in-danger drew wide support. When, in a copy of Congress's technique, the League disobeyed laws, the provincial government was compelled to arrest a large number of defiers, which resulted in a decline in the government's popularity.

In Punjab, the biggest prize, Muslims, Sikhs and Hindus raised private armies. Khizr Hyat Khan, the Premier, was attacked by the League as a stooge of Islam's enemies. Defying restrictions, crowds

of Muslims, including women and students, picketed government buildings, hoisted the League flag over them and interfered with the movement of trains. On March 2, ten days after Attlee's announcement, Khizr gave in and resigned. Next day the Raj unwisely asked the League leader in the legislature, the Khan of Mamdot, to form a government. The Sikhs viewed this as the start of oppression and their leader, Master Tara Singh, exhorted Sikh youths to act. The different private armies took to arms. "Lahore Silk Market Set Ablaze" and "Amritsar Now a Veritable Inferno" were some of the headlines in the first week of March.²⁴⁷ At least a thousand, and perhaps several times that number, were killed in riots in half a dozen cities and numerous villages.²⁴⁸ The Mamdot Ministry, which in any case lacked a majority, was dismissed and the Governor, Evan Jenkins, assumed direct charge of the province, but its unity was dead.

The League lost East Punjab even as it overthrew the Ministry in Lahore. Hindu and Sikh leaders of the province demanded its partition, Patel at once agreed, Jawahar, Azad, C.R. and Prasad fell in, and on March 8 the WorCom proposed that Punjab's "predominantly Muslim portion...be separated from the predominantly non-Muslim portion". Though Bengal was not mentioned, the WorCom resolution clearly implied Congress's support for the partition of that province as well. The League was invited to meet Congress "to discuss methods of ensuring a peaceful transfer of power".²⁴⁹

The Punjab riots were not the reason for the partition proposal but they supplied a hook for displaying the solution that Vallabhbhai had considered and accepted the previous December. It is of some interest, and certainly not a coincidence, that Menon called on Patel each day from March 3 to 7 – paying two visits on March 6 – and that Birla, too, met Vallabhbhai several times in the first week of March. That there was advance preparation is confirmed by the fact that the March 9 issue of the *Hindustan Times* announcing the WorCom's proposal also contains maps showing how Punjab and Bengal could be divided and an editorial that not only commends partition of the two provinces as "the only solution" but also describes as "unreasonable" the opposition to division voiced by Sikhs in West Punjab and Hindus in East Bengal.²⁵⁰ We may note that Devadas Gandhi, the paper's editor, and K. Santhanam, its joint editor, had met Patel on the evening of March 7.²⁵¹

For all its indirectness, the resolution was a public admission that Congress was ready to yield over Pakistan. However, the League gave "a very bad reception" to the idea of East Punjab exercising its own choice. Despite what Jinnah had said to Wavell in November, the

Viceroy's impression on March 12 was that the League expected "to succeed to the whole of the Punjab and the whole of Bengal".²⁵² Gandhi, by now in Bihar, was also perturbed. Gathering, through intuition or an informant, that Vallabhbhai was the resolution's author, even though technically someone else may have drafted it, he was pained at its tacit acceptance of India's division. A two-line letter that he wrote to Patel reveals his unhappiness; the fact that he wrote it almost two weeks after the resolution was published shows that he was aware of his powerlessness. His role as Congress's guide had ended nine months earlier when he asked for permission to leave and no one in the WorCom asked him to stay.

Gandhi to Patel, 22.3.47: *If you can explain your Punjab resolution to me, please do so. I do not understand it.*²⁵³

The reply to this implied that instead of asking for explanations, Gandhi should obey his truth and let Vallabhbhai obey his.

Patel to Gandhi, 24.3.47: *It is difficult, in a letter, to explain the Punjab resolution. It was arrived at after a great deal of reflection, not in haste or without thought. We have gathered from newspapers that you have expressed your opinion against it. You have of course the right to say and do what you feel is right.*²⁵⁴

Gandhi did not know that on March 4, four days before the WorCom's Punjab resolution, Vallabhbhai had conveyed his acceptance of a truncated Pakistan to Jinnah's close friend Kanji Dwarkadas. "If the League insists on Pakistan," Patel had written, "the only alternative is the division of the Punjab and Bengal."²⁵⁵

Vallabhbhai and the Mahatma also differed over a demand of the Bihar Muslim League, supported by Gandhi, for a commission to inquire into the Bihar riots of November 1946. Vallabhbhai and the Raj were agreed that a commission might worsen rather than improve matters. Also, while the Mahatma still hoped to undo India's polarization, Patel took it as a fact of life; he was allergic, moreover, to anything that looked like appeasement of the League. Cool towards any attempt by Gandhi to regain Muslim confidence, the Raj backed Vallabhbhai.

Gandhi to Patel, 25.12.46: *You will have seen the report of the Bihar League. I have no doubt that an impartial commission of inquiry with which no one can find any fault ought to be set up without a day's delay. Whatever is correct in the allegations must be admitted straightaway, and the rest should be referred to the commission.*²⁵⁶

Gandhi to Patel, 5.2.47: *I hear that your opposition is perhaps the reason why the Bihar ministry does not appoint an inquiry commission. If a commission is not appointed, much damage will be done. The ministry will be regarded as guilty. If their work has been above board, what harm can the commission do to them?*

Patel to Gandhi, 10.2.47: *Who told you that I was responsible for the non-appointment of a commission in Bihar? I do think that there is nothing to be gained by appointing it and that there will be some harm instead. The Bihar Governor is responsible for the non-appointment. The Viceroy too is not in favour.*²⁵⁷

Thus it was in association with some of the Raj's key functionaries, and well in advance of his freedom from the Raj, that Vallabhbhai showed his independence vis-a-vis Gandhi. Bitter though this irony may be, Patel's motives were national, not personal. When, in the summer of 1946, he saw eye to eye with Cripps but not with Gandhi, and again in the spring and summer of 1947, when he and Mountbatten agreed with each other whereas he and the Mahatma did not, Vallabhbhai thought Gandhi's advice to be impractical and likely to jeopardize peace as well as the interests of Congress. On the other hand, the views at such times of Cripps, or Mountbatten, or V. P. Menon – though an Indian a trusted Raj official – seemed reasonable to him.

"Though apprehensive about his first meeting with Patel, who [had] the reputation of being the strong man in the Congress High Command," Mountbatten "very quickly detected a twinkle in the Sardar's eye."²⁵⁸ But Vallabhbhai also revealed his toughness to Mountbatten when the latter, after citing a pledge of 25 years service given by the Raj in 1945 to members of the ICS and the Indian Police Service, sought compensation from India for loss of career for officers who chose or were asked to leave on transfer of power. When the previous Viceroy had raised the same point, Patel had said that it would be "most unjust and unfair to saddle Indian revenues with the financial liabilities" arising out of a pledge that should not have been given in 1945, when "the writing on the wall was unmistakably clear". HMG would have to bear the liability if it nonetheless felt bound to award compensation; the future Government of India would not.²⁵⁹ Vallabhbhai reiterated this position to Mountbatten, who then asked what Congress would think of Indian officials who might accept compensation from HMG. "Patel raised his hand and vowed" that such Indians "would never be employed again".²⁶⁰

Gandhi arrived in Delhi from Bihar on March 31. Mountbatten had requested his presence and Patel had written, "I feel very much that you should come."²⁶¹ Vallabhbhai and Manibehn met the Mahatma's

train at 5.30 a.m. and took him to the Bhangi Colony. At 5 p.m. Patel dropped Gandhi at the Viceroy's House. Next morning – the first of April – the Mahatma called again on the Viceroy and made his last throw to avert partition. He suggested to Mountbatten that the Interim Government be dissolved and Jinnah invited to form a Cabinet of his choice. As long as Mountbatten thought that the League leader was acting in India's interest, Congress would cooperate with Jinnah and not use its majority in the Central Assembly to block his ministry. If he wished, Jinnah could even continue to advocate Pakistan, provided he eschewed force.

A "staggered" Mountbatten obtained Gandhi's permission "to discuss the matter with Pandit Nehru and Maulana Azad, in strict confidence, the next time they came to see me".²⁶² Vallabhbhai was excluded; his "opposition to any such plan was well-known".²⁶³ Nonetheless, Menon – retained by Viceroy as Secretary (Reforms) and working directly under him²⁶⁴ – called on Patel at 2.30 p.m. and later that afternoon the Sardar met Mountbatten. Gandhi's solution was not discussed at this meeting but the Viceroy told Vallabhbhai that he agreed with him that Gandhi was wrong in asking for an inquiry into the Bihar riots.²⁶⁵

On April 2 Gandhi again met Mountbatten and repeated his proposal, adding that he would exercise his influence with Congress for its acceptance and, if necessary, "tour the length and breadth of the country" to enlist popular backing.²⁶⁶ Mountbatten said that he was convinced of Gandhi's sincerity, whereupon the latter asked if he could tell his colleagues that the Viceroy supported the plan. "You can say that I am very interested," Mountbatten replied, adding, however, that before committing himself to the plan he would need an assurance from some of the other leaders that it could be implemented.²⁶⁷

Azad called on the Viceroy half an hour after the latter's interview with Gandhi. We have Mountbatten's account of what Azad said:

*I told him straightaway of Gandhi's plan, of which he already knew from Gandhi that morning. He staggered me by saying that in his opinion it was perfectly feasible of being carried out, since Gandhi could unquestionably influence the whole of Congress to accept it and work it loyally. He further thought that there was a chance that I might get Jinnah to accept it, and he thought that such a plan would be the quickest way to stop bloodshed.*²⁶⁸

But the plan was never put to Jinnah. As expected, Patel roundly opposed it. So did Nehru, though Gandhi had thought that he would be able to secure Jawaharlal's support, and Mountbatten had feared likewise. To avert the realization of his fears, the Viceroy sought

the help of a close friend of Jawaharlal's, V. K. Krishna Menon. After Mountbatten and Menon had lunched together on April 5, "Krishna Menon and Ismay (chief of the Viceroy's staff), at Mountbatten's request, had a prolonged talk about Gandhi's proposals".²⁶⁹ Then Krishna Menon went to work on Nehru. The other Menon, meanwhile, had composed a formidable critique of Gandhi's plan and claimed that it would suit neither Jinnah, nor the Viceroy, nor the Congress. He had prepared, too, another confidential note entitled, "Tactics to be adopted with Gandhi as regards his scheme".²⁷⁰ We are struck by the vigour of V. P. Menon's exertion against the plan and by his teamwork with Patel over it – he called on the Sardar at 10 p.m. on April 7, at 7 a.m. on April 8 and at 9.45 p.m. on April 9.²⁷¹

There was a moment on April 10 when Mountbatten thought that "Mr Gandhi's famous scheme may yet go through". In the middle of a three-hour meeting with Jinnah, the Viceroy had said – we do not know how sincerely – "that it was a day-dream of mine to be able to put the Central Government under the Prime Ministership of Mr Jinnah himself". Some 35 minutes later, Jinnah "suddenly made a reference out of the blue" to the fact that Mountbatten had "wanted him to be the Prime Minister".²⁷² Jinnah's reaction bothered Mountbatten but later that evening Vallabhbhai, Nehru and others of the WorCom – including, it would seem, Azad, his remarks of April 2 notwithstanding – told Gandhi that they were opposed to his plan. Only Ghaffar Khan sided with the Mahatma. C.R. would note in his diary that Gandhi's "ill-conceived plan of solving the present difficulties" was "objected to by everybody and scotched". The Mahatma admitted defeat.

Gandhi to Mountbatten, 11.4.47: *I am sorry to say that I failed to carry any of [the WorCom] with me except Badshah Khan.... I could not convince them of the correctness of my plan. Thus I have to ask you to omit me from your consideration.*²⁷³

A day later Gandhi left for Patna. A letter he wrote from the train concedes Vallabhbhai's victory.

Gandhi to Patel, 13.4.47: *There is a wide and frequent divergence of views between us. In the circumstances, is it desirable that I should see the Viceroy even in my individual capacity? Think over it dispassionately.... It is possible that in the course of administering the affairs of the millions you can see what I cannot. Perhaps I too would act and speak as you do if I were in your place.*²⁷⁴

* Entry dated 13.4.47. (Rajagopalachari papers)

Had Gandhi's offer been put to him, would Jinnah have accepted it? V. P. Menon thought at the time that he would not, and some future Pakistani scholars would agree with him.²⁷⁵ However, one of Jinnah's biographers thinks that Gandhi's plan "might just have worked; surely this was a King Solomon solution".²⁷⁶ That Jinnah's acceptance was not to be ruled out is suggested by what the League leader had said about a similar proposal in August 1942:

*If they (the Congress) are sincere, I should welcome it. If the British Government accepts the solemn declaration of Mr Gandhi and by an arrangement hands over the government of the country to the Muslim League, I am sure that under Muslim rule non-Muslims would be treated fairly, justly, nay generously...*²⁷⁷

To Vallabhbhai, however, Jinnah's acceptance was not the sole or even the main consideration. He hated appeasement, and while he had backed the 1942 proposal he did not think that Hindus would tolerate Muslim rule in the embittered climate of 1947.

Unhappy at the prospect of partition, Azad proposed the "following way out" to Mountbatten on April 14: "Let both the Congress and the League agree that they will accept your reading (of the Cabinet Mission Plan), not in your capacity as the Viceroy but in your personal capacity." If, added Azad, the Viceroy could get Jinnah to "accept this solution", he would undertake to "persuade the Congress to do the same".²⁷⁸ Patel's reaction to Azad's proposal was conveyed by V. P. Menon to Abell, the Viceroy's Private Secretary. Abell told Mountbatten on April 17 that "Mr Menon has it on very good authority that the Congress would not accept Maulana Azad's proposal".²⁷⁹ Fully aware of who the "very good authority" was, Mountbatten ignored Azad's suggestion.

Since the Raj had the capacity, even while being wound up, to hinder or help Congress, Vallabhbhai looked for opportunities to show his goodwill towards Britain. To Arthur Henderson, under-secretary of state of India, who had visited India to discuss the future of the ICS, he wrote in April:

*I should state that I greatly welcomed the opportunity of meeting you personally.... We are all watching with admiration the keen struggle which all of you are putting up against your own domestic difficulties. I made it a point to refer [to it] in my public speeches....*²⁸⁰

But he retained his bluntness. He called Abell "the Secretary of the Muslim League" to his face. Later, however, Patel unreservedly withdrew the aspersion.²⁸¹ Referring, in a talk with Mountbatten, to

fresh incidents of violence against Hindus and Sikhs in parts of Punjab and the N.W.F.P., he said:

*There is a civil war on and you are doing nothing to stop it. You won't govern yourself and you won't let the Central Government govern.*²⁸²

Law and order was a provincial subject and there was little that the Home Member in New Delhi could do to curb riots. Patel hated his helplessness.²⁸³ He also resented an attempt by Mountbatten to veto his choice of a relief for Porter, the Home Secretary, who was going on seven months leave. After Vallabhbhai had proposed that Banerji, the Commonwealth Relations Secretary, should act in Porter's place, Mountbatten, who wanted Williams, joint secretary in the Home department, to officiate for Porter, wrote on the file that the Selection Board should review Patel's recommendation. The Board – a committee of secretaries – duly proposed Williams, whereupon Vallabhbhai again minuted that he preferred Banerji and added that the reference to the Selection Board was "both pointless and inappropriate". The Viceroy exploded at Patel's "insubordination", as he called it, and "replied on the same minute sheet" that "the tone and substance of the Home Member's minute should probably be taken in Cabinet".²⁸⁴ Yet, unable to cite any ground against Banerji's appointment, Mountbatten accepted it.

Plain words were obviously used on April 24 when the Sardar and Mountbatten discussed each other's minutes. In the end it was agreed that the hot minute sheet would be withdrawn, without affecting Banerji's selection. However, the account that Mountbatten has supplied in an "addendum"²⁸⁵ to his earlier record of the interview seems fanciful. Undated but clearly composed long after the event, the "addendum" speaks of "my victory over Patel", a curious comment in the light of Mountbatten's acquiescence in Banerji's appointment. Mountbatten states in the "addendum" that he told Patel during the interview that "unless he withdrew his minute then and there I would send for his Prime Minister and announce my resignation to him". He could not have said this, for Nehru was not Prime Minister then and even informally was not described as one. Another claim in the "addendum" is that Vallabhbhai "completely collapsed and gave in" after Mountbatten threatened to quit. Immediately after the interview, however, Mountbatten had recorded the remark with which Patel had ended it. We have already quoted the remark ("You won't govern yourself etc."), which could not have been the parting shot of one who minutes earlier had "completely collapsed".

Mountbatten's explanation for not recording Vallabhbhai's "collapse" at the time is that he "deliberately suppressed an ugly scene with Patel to avoid inflaming British staff opinion against him". Apparently the Viceroy's notes, dictated as soon as an interview ended, were shared with his staff, whose views on tactics he constantly sought. But the words that Mountbatten recorded at the time are sharper than the ones he claims to have deliberately suppressed. The addendum, in short, is dubious. It is not, alas, the only evidence of the dashing Admiral's effort, carried out with less than full scrupulosity, to paint an all-conquering Viceroy into his self-portrait.

Though clear in his mind that partition – and not mediation or generosity – was the way out, Vallabhbhai had not yet gone on record or talked frankly in its favour. The map of a united India, to which until recent events he himself had been deeply devoted, was inscribed on numberless hearts. Any premature utterance was liable to draw fire and, possibly, push Gandhi from dissent into defiance. That was why Patel's Punjab resolution, while paving the way for the country's division, had been silent about it.²⁸⁶

On April 25, however, Vallabhbhai allowed himself to be recorded as being pro-partition – but with a proviso. He told Mountbatten in the presence of a selection of the Viceroy's staff that "if the Muslim League did not accept the Cabinet Mission's Plan", – and by this Patel meant, though he did not say so, the plan as interpreted by Congress – then "Congress desired partition".²⁸⁷ Vallabhbhai's true opinion of the Mission Plan was revealed when Mountbatten observed that Jinnah, who was as tired as Patel of the Congress-League "coalition", had "requested him not... to ask him to accept the Cabinet Mission Plan". "All right, don't ask him," Vallabhbhai responded.²⁸⁸ Next day, however, Patel sent Mountbatten a long letter in which he repeated the claim that Congress had accepted the Mission Plan and sought to prove that Congress's interpretation of the Plan was just. This letter was for the record: it would show that Vallabhbhai had striven till the end to avert partition.²⁸⁹ Less wary than Patel and as fully resigned to partition, Nehru had by this time openly conceded it. In a public speech on April 20 he said:

*The Muslim League can have Pakistan, if they wish to have it, but on the condition that they do not take away other parts of India which do not wish to join Pakistan.*²⁹⁰

It was undoubtedly with Vallabhbhai's consent, if not on his advice, that Prasad, who had been elected President of the Constituent Assembly, told the Assembly on April 29 that

*It may be that the Union may not comprise all provinces. If that unfortunately comes to pass, we shall have to be content with a constitution for a part of it... This may mean not only a division of India, but a division of some provinces.*²⁹¹

Patel waited until May 9 before publicly conceding Pakistan himself. Choosing an international news agency, the Associated Press of America, for the purpose, he told the agency's correspondent:

An alternative in the event that the British decided that India must be divided (is) that power (can) be transferred to the Constituent Assemblies. The League already has a separate Constituent Assembly in the members elected to the Assembly they have consistently boycotted.

*The Congress position has always been that it will not coerce any group or area which does not want to remain. At the same time it will not be coerced... Therefore if the Muslim League insists it wants separation, then Congress will not compel them to remain by force. But it will result in dividing Bengal and Punjab.*²⁹²

Vallabhbhai's prudence has not ended even if his silence has. He will concede Pakistan if the League insists and the British decide on it and because Congress has *always* stood out against coercion. The onus for the U turn belongs to others; and it is not in fact a U turn. Between December 1946, when Patel was converted to partition, and May/June 1947, when Indian opinion was converted to it, he had displayed tactics of a high order. In patience, timing, choice of argument and the willingness to let others advocate his remedy,* he provided an object lesson to C.R., who five years earlier had been flung into the wilderness for preaching the same remedy. The times and circumstances were, of course, entirely different; it is striking, nonetheless, that Vallabhbhai was patient where Rajaji had been hasty, and that while C.R. had argued at length in favour of his remedy, Patel kept quiet until it was time to say that his search for alternatives had failed.

Partition, we know, was only one half of the remedy that Vallabhbhai had accepted in December 1946. Dominion status was the other half but, as with partition, he had refrained from speaking in its favour. He had good reason. Time and again Congress had rejected Dominion status in favour of "complete independence", and the Constituent Assembly, at Nehru's instance, had declared its "firm and solemn resolve to proclaim India as an independent sovereign

* "It is amazing how Sardar Patel throws all the burdens of all his battles on others." Rajaji in his diary, 28.3.47. (Rajagopalachari papers).

republic".²⁹³ The Sardar's hand was forced by a message from Menon.²⁹⁴ This was that Mountbatten and his advisers had settled on a plan of transfer of power whereby India, Punjab and Bengal would be partitioned — to which Patel was reconciled —, and whereby power would be demitted directly to provinces and the princely states who would then decide whether or not they wanted to form an Indian union, a recipe for fragmentation at which Vallabhbhai was aghast.

Two of the Viceroy's principal aides, Ismay and Abell, had left for London on May 2 with the draft of this Plan Balkan, as it has been aptly called.²⁹⁵ Realizing that he would need HMG's support to defeat it, Patel decided that he would declare his readiness for Dominion status. He did so in that May 9 interview with A.P.A. "With Dominion functions," he added, "the central government would form a strong centre and would have the necessary power to put down disorder."²⁹⁶ He also strove to win Nehru to this point of view, an endeavour in which Krishna Menon became his ally.²⁹⁷ Nehru was persuaded, and V. P. Menon informed Mountbatten that both Vallabhbhai and Nehru would take Dominion status. The Viceroy at once cabled the joyous tidings to HMG.²⁹⁸

It was from Simla, where he had gone for a break, that Mountbatten had cabled London. Jawaharlal was his guest there, as was Krishna Menon. Two of the Viceroy's advisers were also in Simla, Eric Mievill and a V. P. Menon saddened by the progress of the Plan Balkan. He had objected to it but Ismay and Abell had overruled him. In Simla Menon spoke to the Viceroy, on May 8, of *his* transfer of power plan, for which, as we know, he had already secured Patel's approval. He had not spelt it out earlier to Mountbatten. The Viceroy sparked to the scheme and asked Menon to discover Nehru's reactions to it. Mountbatten had backed the Plan Balkan out of thoughtlessness, not wickedness, and because he had assumed, from Nehru's polite responses to hints of the Plan, that Congress would accept it. Menon found on May 9 that Nehru's reactions to his scheme were largely positive and communicated his finding to the Viceroy and, over the phone, to Vallabhbhai in Delhi.²⁹⁹

On the morning of May 10, after another call to Patel, Menon expounded his plan to an audience of three: Mountbatten, Nehru and Mievill. That afternoon Jawaharlal phoned Vallabhbhai, gave him the gist of Menon's plan and asked what the Sardar thought of it. "There is no alternative but to accept this plan," Patel replied. "Under it we lose only a fraction of India. Under the other plan we risk losing all of it." Nehru was relieved to find that the Sardar was with him but he had two anxieties. Would the WorCom accept the new plan? And what about Bapu? Jawaharlal had told Menon a short while earlier that "the Sardar will have to speak to Bapu."

After saying that he was sure the WorCom would agree to what the two of them jointly supported, Vallabhbhai turned to Jawaharlal's query about the man who had named Nehru his heir. "It will be my responsibility," the Sardar said, "to make sure that Bapu sees our point of view". Nehru "finally asked Sardar if in that case he should go ahead." If Jawahar was impulsive in public and hesitant when alone, Patel, cautious in public, was bold when the moment of personal decision came. His reply to Nehru was "a very firm affirmative". Thus was clinched, on the afternoon of May 10, the consent of Congress to the partition of India.³⁰⁰ Learning of Nehru's and Patel's response to Menon's scheme, and discovering moreover that Nehru was violently opposed to the Plan Balkan, which the Viceroy showed on the night of May 10 to Nehru, Mountbatten abandoned the Plan Balkan and sponsored in its place the Plan Menon or, as we may call it, the Partition plan.

Even as Vallabhbhai had proposed in his A.P.A. interview, the new plan envisaged the transfer of power to two entities, the existing Constituent Assembly and another formed by members from Sind, Baluchistan, West Punjab and East Bengal. A diminished India would obtain Dominion status through the first Assembly, Pakistan through the second. Dominion status would in no way be less than absolute independence: either Dominion could leave the Commonwealth the moment it desired. The N.W.F.P. would choose between India and Pakistan through a referendum, as would Assam's Sylhet district, which had a clear Muslim majority. The princely states would have the right to join either India or Pakistan or stay out. The defence forces would be divided; and a commission would demarcate the lines of division in Punjab and Bengal.

* * *

Returning to the plains, Mountbatten worked at great speed, presented the Partition plan to Patel and Nehru, Jinnah and Liaquat, and Baldev Singh. On May 17 he obtained Nehru's written approval: "With great regret and in considerable agony of spirit we have agreed to these proposals.... I have consulted Sardar Patel and this letter generally represents his views also."³⁰¹

Jinnah was much more wary. In March he had refused to respond to Congress's invitation to discuss a settlement on the basis of partitioning Punjab and Bengal. Later, reacting sarcastically and angrily to Patel's A.P.A. interview, he had spoken of the Sardar's "sudden affection for Dominion status" and of "this new Congress stunt" – the call for partitioning Punjab and Bengal. He attacked it as "a sinister move" but when it came to arguing against it, Pakistan's

formidable advocate could only repeat Congress's objections to India's division:

*This must lead to... fragmentation. And this cannot be supported morally. And it is absolutely destructive, because it will lead to seriously breaking up the provinces economically; splitting up the Sikhs and Hindus and politically not only dangerous for the present but more so in the future.*³⁰²

The terms sounded less sinister to Jinnah when, in the middle of May, they came from Mountbatten rather than from Patel or Congress. The Viceroy found that Jinnah "appeared absolutely to agree to [the Partition plan's] general principles"³⁰³ even though refusing to put his signature to them.

Accompanied by Menon, Mountbatten left for London to get HMG's formal agreement. Vallabhbhai, accompanied by Manibehn, and Jawaharlal, accompanied by his daughter Indira, left for Mussoorie. Patel had wanted Gandhi, who was due in Delhi at the end of the month, to join them in Mussoorie. "It is not easy in a letter to tell you about developments here," Vallabhbhai had written to the Mahatma in Patna, adding, "We will talk when we meet."³⁰⁴ Gandhi seems to have sensed that Patel and Nehru had made their decisions and given their word to the Raj. "I feel no enthusiasm at all to go to Mussoorie," he replied.³⁰⁵

Though Gandhi felt excluded, the Sardar's WorCom colleagues acknowledged Patel's crucial role. Sarojini Naidu called him, on May 11, "the man of decision and the man of action in our counsels", and Kripalani, the party president, said on the same day: "When we are faced with thorny problems, and Gandhi's advice is not available, we consider Sardar Patel as our leader."³⁰⁶

The ten days in Mussoorie, where Vallabhbhai took long walks, their pace comfortable rather than brisk, and inhaled the hill air, did much for his exhausted body. The Birlas had a house there too, and Patel stayed there. Nehru divided his holiday between Dehra Dun and Mussoorie. Pant was in the hill town and stopped the Sardar on his walks or called on him, and official business came from Delhi, but there was time to think of the future, which seemed clearer in shape.

Vallabhbhai returned to Delhi on May 28 and went the same evening to Bhangi Colony. Gandhi had arrived and Patel had to fulfil his word that he would bring the Mahatma round. Their 45 minutes on the 28th evening were followed by a 90-minute discussion the following day and by another ninety minutes on the evening of May 30. The WorCom met on May 31 and June 1 and 2 to consider the Partition plan. On June 2 the Mahatma told the WorCom that "he

disagrees but will not stand in the way'.³⁰⁷ The previous day, waking before 3 a.m. and musing on his bed, the Mahatma had said:

Today I find myself all alone. Even the Sardar and Jawaharlal think that my reading is wrong and peace is sure to return if partition is agreed upon.... They did not like my telling the Viceroy that even if there was to be partition, it should not be through British intervention.... They wonder if I have not deteriorated with age.

*I cannot bear to see Badshah Khan's grief.... His inner agony wrings my heart. But if I gave way to tears it would be cowardly and, stalwart Pathan though he is, he would break down.*³⁰⁸

What did Vallabhbhai say to the Mahatma? And why did Gandhi not stand in the way? There is no record of the talks: no one else seems to have been present. But those who were close to the Sardar gathered what he had said. According to H. M. Patel, Vallabhbhai

*put it fair and square to Bapu: "It is a question of civil war or partition. As for civil war, no one can say where it will start and where it will end. True, the Hindus might win in the end but only after paying an unpredictable and huge price." Bapu acquiesced.*³⁰⁹

Nehru, C.R., Prasad, Kripalani and others expressed similar views to the Mahatma and Patel's remedy seemed to have the public's backing. The Hindus and Sikhs of East Punjab and the Hindus of West Bengal had openly asked for partition. The Mahatma would say at his prayer meeting on June 10 that he "could not coerce public opinion" and that "non-Muslim India is overwhelmingly in favour of partition".³¹⁰ Unable to compel public opinion, the Mahatma was also reluctant to disown colleagues with whom he had shared a struggle and who had done his bidding for thirty years. He would speak, on July 22, of "the love that binds me to Jawahar and Sardar". "They have tied me to them," he would add, "with the chains of their love."³¹¹ In the summer of 1947, Vallabhbhai encashed the loyal toil of thirty years. Saddened that Patel and in fact "everybody" was "impatient for independence". and acutely aware that independence and power had become synonymous, Gandhi was, however, loth to repudiate Vallabhbhai, Nehru, C.R., Prasad, Kripalani....³¹²

He considered one final revolutionary movement but abandoned it because a second line of leadership was not around. Several assorted Congressmen disliked the Partition plan – the conservative Purshottamdas Tandon of the U.P., Jayaprakash, Lohia and the other socialists, and Hindu leaders from Sind, West Punjab and East Bengal – but, apart from the fact that they comprised a minority, they had little

in common with one another; the socialists, moreover, had conflicted sharply with Gandhi over issues such as the 1946 naval mutiny. In 1942, when he launched Quit India, the Sardar was on the Mahatma's side. Now Gandhi was older, Vallabhbhai and Nehru were both opposed to him (a rare phenomenon), and there was no new team that could, while rejecting Partition, "take over the reins of the Congress and the government" and enforce "peace in the country" – to quote some of the expressions the Mahatma used. "Well, I have not that strength today," a defeated Gandhi told the AICC on June 14, "or else I would declare rebellion single handed."³¹³

As for Azad, whatever his private views, he did not oppose Partition in the WorCom. "Maulana Azad sat in a chair throughout the two days of (the WorCom) meeting in a corner of the very small room which packed us all, puffed away at his endless cigarettes and spoke not a word." So writes Lohia, a special invitee. According to Lohia, barring four persons – himself, Jayaprakash, who was another special invitee, Ghaffar Khan and Gandhi – "none spoke a word in opposition of partition". And though the Mahatma "turned to Mr Nehru and Sardar Patel in mild complaint that they had not informed him of the scheme of partition before committing themselves to it", he stopped well short of obstructing "a leadership united for acceptance".³¹⁴

* * *

Vallabhbhai's Pakistan was sharply delimited. Returning from London on the night of May 30, Mountbatten, in his own words, "sent V. P. Menon to see Patel to obtain his agreement to six months joint control of Calcutta", which is what Jinnah had been pressing for. The Viceroy recorded Patel's reply: "Not even for six hours!"³¹⁵ Earlier, during Mountbatten's absence, Jinnah had demanded an 800-mile "Corridor" to link West and East Pakistan. Patel called the claim "such fantastic nonsense as not to be taken seriously".³¹⁶ It died a quick and unremembered death.

Four parties, the Raj, Congress, the League and the Sikhs, assembled for a historic meeting at Viceroy's House on June 2. Nehru, Kripalani and Baldev Singh had come first to 1 Aurangzeb Road, from where the three and Vallabhbhai went together to the Raj's palace. Jinnah, Liaquat and Nishtar represented the League, and Mountbatten the Empire. After formally inviting the three Indian parties to send their acceptances, the Viceroy obtained the agreement of Nehru, Jinnah and Baldev Singh to join him in broadcasting to the Indian public the following evening, whereupon – to quote the Raj's official record – "Sardar Patel pointed out, with a smile on his face, that the

general rule was for the scripts of broadcast speeches to be submitted to the Honourable Member for Information and Broadcasting before they were used!"³¹⁷

At 0030 hours on June 3 Kripalani's letter conveying Congress's acceptance was delivered at Viceroy's House, where Jinnah had just spent an hour explaining to Mountbatten that he could not sign on the League's behalf until the party's Council met; the Council, however, could not be called for several days. An exasperated Mountbatten finally said that a nod from Jinnah at the next meeting of the parties would suffice. The nod was duly given on the morning of June 3; Baldev Singh accepted on behalf of the Sikhs; and, a few thousand miles away, Attlee presented the Plan to the House of Commons. Next day, in a meeting with reporters, Mountbatten almost casually announced, "I think the transfer could be about the 15th August."³¹⁸

On June 2, the WorCom had ratified Patel's and Nehru's acceptance of Partition. On June 14 and 15, the AICC met to consider the WorCom's decision. Gandhi told the AICC that his views were well-known but he was asking for endorsement of the WorCom's step. It would be "most unwise", if not impossible, to replace the "old and tried servants of the nation" who had agreed with Britain and the League on Congress's behalf.³¹⁹ Nehru, Azad, Pant and Kripalani defended the WorCom's view. Tandon and Choithram Gidwani of Sind spoke passionately in opposition. Several "sobbed unabashedly" when Gidwani spoke of the "ultimate sacrifice" of the Hindus in Muslim-majority areas "on the altar of political expediency".³²⁰ Maulana Hifzur Rahman vehemently opposed partition and Dr Saifuddin Kitchlew called it a surrender to communalism. But, as one of Nehru's biographers has put it, "it was Patel who delivered the keynote address".³²¹ He who knew when to be silent also knew how to speak out when the moment for plain words arrived:

I fully appreciate the fears of our brothers from [the Muslim-majority areas]. Nobody likes the division of India and my heart is heavy. But the choice is between one division and many divisions. We must face facts. We cannot give way to emotionalism and sentimentality.

The Working Committee has not acted out of fear. But I am afraid of one thing, that all our toil and hard work of these many years might go waste or prove unfruitful.

My nine months in office have completely disillusioned me regarding the supposed merits of the Cabinet Mission Plan. Except for a few honourable exceptions, Muslim officials from the top down

to the chaprasis are working for the League. The communal veto given to the League in the Mission Plan would have blocked India's progress at every stage.

Whether or not we like it, de facto Pakistan already exists in Punjab and Bengal. Under the circumstances I would prefer a de jure Pakistan which may make the League more responsible.

*Freedom is coming. We have 75 to 80 percent of India which we can make strong with our own genius. The League can develop the rest of the country.*³²²

By 157 votes to 27, with 32 remaining neutral, a resolution endorsing the WorCom's step was passed. However, as a member noted, "it was the only resolution other than a condolence resolution approved in total silence during my 40 years in Congress."³²³

* * *

Neither Ghaffar Khan – or the Frontier Gandhi, Badshah Khan or Bacha Khan, as he was variously called – nor his brother Dr Khan Sahib, the N.W.F.P. Premier, attended the AICC meeting. The Partition Plan had sacrificed the Frontier's Congressmen. First Nehru on his own, then Vallabhbhai and Nehru and finally the WorCom and the AICC agreed to a referendum in the N.W.F.P. to determine whether it would join India or Pakistan. In the February 1946 elections, which the League had fought on the issue of Pakistan, the League had won 17 out of the 38 Muslim seats in the Frontier and Congress 30 seats in all, including 19 Muslim seats. But, in mid-1947's charged climate, a referendum on joining India or Pakistan would be twisted into loyalty to Islam versus its betrayal and produce only one result. Yet Mountbatten induced Jawaharlal, in the third week of April, to accept the principle of a referendum.³²⁴ Objecting to the principle was not easy but asking for time to consult the WorCom was not difficult. Failing, however, to take the latter course, Jawaharlal confessed to Gandhi afterwards that "some of us are more or less committed" to the referendum.³²⁵

Patel blamed Jawaharlal³²⁶ but there is no evidence that he strove to rectify the position. He liked Ghaffar Khan, called him "one of the true followers of the Prophet"³²⁷ and felt a rapport with him that he lacked with Azad,³²⁸ but he was not prepared to break with the Raj on the question of the Frontier. Convinced that the great majority of Muslims believed in the two-nation theory, he did not exempt the Frontier Muslims from this generalization. The possibility, under the Cabinet Mission Plan, of Assam being absorbed by Bengal had outraged him but he was not similarly affected by what Punjab might

do to the Frontier. Moreover, Vallabhbhai did not always approve of the Khan brothers' actions.

Patel to Gandhi, 17.1.47: *In Hazara district (in the N.W.F.P.), there are nine lakh Muslims, Hindus and Sikhs combined make 31,000. Out of these, 20,000 have already fled. The number of killed is from 40 to 50.*

*Badshah Khan has gone to Bihar, where nothing is happening. But he will do as he thinks fit.... The League is making poisonous propaganda, but Dr Khan Sahib is afraid to take strong action.*³²⁹

Clear on his priority – obtaining control over ‘75 to 80 per cent of India’ –, the Sardar had concluded that the N.W.F.P. ‘would have to be written off’.³³⁰ When the WorCom met in Delhi at the end of May, after Jawaharlal had conveyed his and Patel's acceptance of the Partition Plan to the Viceroy, Ghaffar Khan

*spoke a bare two sentences. He expressed his sorrow over the fact that his colleagues had accepted the scheme of partition. As a small mercy, he wanted them to find out if the proposed plebiscite in the North West Frontier could include the alternative of independence alongside the choice of India or Pakistan. He spoke not a word more....*³³¹

Neither Vallabhbhai nor Nehru felt they could propose this change to the Viceroy. It would open a Pandora's box and encourage princely states to seek independence. Gandhi backed Ghaffar Khan, who with his Pathan colleagues had faithfully stood by Congress and disproved the two-nation theory, but to little effect. Congress policy was now being determined by Patel and Nehru. With independence a certainty, partition being conceded and power rushing towards them, Vallabhbhai and Jawaharlal were more at one in the first eight months of 1947 than at any other time before or since.

Left to fend for themselves, the Khan brothers and their Frontier supporters boycotted the referendum. Held in July, it produced 289,244 votes for Pakistan and 2,874 for India, with about 280,000 not voting. The future would find Badshah Khan, as the past had, in prison for long years but his friendship for Hindus and India, belief in non-violence and desire for Pathan autonomy were all intact when he died in 1988 – at the age of 98.

* * *

If they joined India, the 565 princely states would to some extent compensate for Pakistan's secession. If they did not, Indian

independence might be disrupted at birth. On June 27 a communique announced that the Sardar would head a new Department of States. Patel, who did not give up his other charges, asked V. P. Menon to be the Department's Secretary; the Sardar had successfully resisted Nehru's desire to place H. V. R. Ienger in that position.³³² That Vallabhbhai rather than Jawaharlal became the States Member did not mean that Nehru's involvement in the affairs of princely States was shallow: he was in fact the president, in 1947, of the All India States Peoples Conference. But from October 1946 Patel had made the States' question his own,³³³ which from India's point of view was fortunate, for while both he and Jawaharlal wanted the States to join India and democracy to grow in the States, Vallabhbhai was more likely to tackle the issues one at a time.

Also, the 1939 Rajkot struggle notwithstanding, Patel did not seem as hostile as Nehru to the princely order and was thus in a better position to bargain with it. "The problem of the States is so difficult that you alone can solve it," Gandhi said to Vallabhbhai;³³⁴ but we should recognize that the decision to let Patel handle the States was one that Nehru and the Sardar had jointly reached. They had their separate talents and their differences, yet there was a core of truth in a broad remark that Menon had made to Mountbatten on June 4: "Sardar Patel and Pandit Nehru are invariably in complete agreement on fundamental issues."³³⁵

Nevertheless, Mountbatten recorded his relief that "Patel, essentially a realist and very sensible" and not Nehru was to be the States Member, and even the Nawab of Bhopal, the Chancellor of the Chamber of Princes, who had earlier said to Mountbatten that his State "would be assuming an independent status", was delighted. "This alters the whole outlook for the States," the Nawab evidently told the Viceroy on hearing the news.³³⁶ Mountbatten's goodwill was particularly important: he could be doubly useful, as Viceroy and cousin to the King, in winning over the princes.

The Raj had announced that with the transfer of power the British Crown's special relationship with Indian princes would come to an end. "The void will have to be filled," it explained, "either by the States entering into a federal relationship with the successor Government or Governments or, failing this, entering into particular political arrangements with it or them."³³⁷ Led by Bikaner, Patiala and Baroda, some States had demonstrated their desire to cooperate with the rest of India by joining the Constituent Assembly. On April 28, representatives of these three States as well as of Cochin, Jaipur, Jodhpur and Rewa took their seats in the Constituent Assembly, where they hoped to negotiate their association with the rest of India.

But the majority had stayed away, and the rulers of some States openly claimed that they would be sovereign from August 15, when HMG's paramountcy ended. The Dewan of Travancore, C. P. Ramaswami Aiyar, declared on June 11 that Travancore "had decided to set itself up as an independent sovereign state." He intended, Aiyar added, to "appoint a Trade Agent in Pakistan."³³⁸ On June 12 it was announced in Hyderabad that the Nizam would claim independence.

Earlier, alerted to the Nizam's bid for sway over Bastar, Vallabhbhai had moved to thwart it. In May, well before assuming charge of the States Department, he had tackled Sir Conrad Corfield, who as Political Adviser was the Viceroy's chief guide on States. Corfield "took the stand that his Department was the guardian of the minor ruler (of Bastar) and at liberty to enter into the contract (with Hyderabad) in his interests." Patel told the Adviser that he "would not allow the interests of the people to be bartered away," and though Corfield's Department seemed "anxious to complete the deal in a hurry," Vallabhbhai's opposition squashed it.³³⁹

Denied Bastar, the Nizam was set on independence. He and the ruler of Travancore received full support from Jinnah, who declared on June 18 that "the States would be sovereign on the termination of paramountcy" and were "free to remain independent if they so desired."³⁴⁰ To this view Corfield gave his influential backing by saying that the term "particular political relations" in HMG's policy statement implied "relations with autonomous units."³⁴¹

Though reacting positively to Patel's appointment, the Nawab of Bhopal had resigned the Chancellorship of the Chamber of Princes in protest at the Raj's plan for transfer of power. Referred to by Mountbatten as "my second best friend in India,"³⁴² the Nawab told the Viceroy on June 3 that the new Plan was worse than the Cabinet Mission scheme, which had envisaged a weak centre: "Now there will be a tight centre, whichever Dominion we join, which will utterly destroy us."³⁴³ Mountbatten's support was sought by the Nawab for "his idea of States being allowed to group together and have Dominion status," and the Nizam of Hyderabad formally asked HMG to be treated as a Dominion.³⁴⁴

Apart from toying with independence, the ruler of Bhopal also considered joining Pakistan, despite the fact that his State was predominantly Hindu and far from the Pakistan boundary, an idea that sounded less far-fetched and more dangerous when it was linked to a wider dream. K. M. Munshi was not alone in believing that Jinnah had given his "blessings" to an attempt "to project Pakistan right across India through the states of Jodhpur, Udaipur, Indore, Bhopal and Baroda."³⁴⁵ In any event, the ruler of Jodhpur, a preponderantly

Hindu State bordering Pakistan, came close to joining Pakistan after having more than one meeting with Jinnah in August 1947.³⁴⁶ According to the ruler, Hanwant Singh, Jinnah "handed him a blank sheet of paper on which to write all the concessions he wanted."³⁴⁷ Six weeks earlier Vallabhbhai had told Menon that "the situation held dangerous potentialities" and that "our hard-earned freedom might disappear through the States' door."³⁴⁸

The wooing of princes by Patel had in fact started early in May, with Rulers or their Dewans being invited over to 1 Aurangzeb Road. The Maharaja of Jodhpur came for lunch on May 6, the Jamsaheb of Nawanager and his Rani on May 11, and the Maharaja of Patiala on May 16. The move with Jamsaheb Digvijaysinhji was specially noteworthy, for Vallabhbhai had suspected the Jamsaheb's hand in the hostility that in 1939 had threatened his life in Rajkot.³⁴⁹ "Years of aloofness and antipathy" stood between them.³⁵⁰ Yet a number of his brother princes in Kathiawad and beyond looked up to the Jamsaheb, calling him "Uncle" and Patel was keen to befriend him. In Colonel Himatsinhji of the Indian Army, a Delhi-based brother of the Jamsaheb, Vallabhbhai found a bridge. Accepting the Sardar's invitation, the Jamsaheb flew with his wife to Delhi. Himatsinhji brought them to 1 Aurangzeb Road, where the Sardar welcomed them at the steps of the house "with one of his rare winning smiles." The past was forgotten in the 90 minutes that followed and "a bond of affection and friendship was sealed." The Jamsaheb gave his word that he would help to bring the princes round.³⁵¹ "You have converted Jamsaheb," Patel was told by Sir B. L. Mitter, the Dewan of Baroda, who had felt six months earlier that the Jamsaheb was in league with the Political Department.³⁵²

This evidence of Vallabhbhai's exertions in the first half of May knocks down a story that Mountbatten would afterwards float:

*"The first time he debated the States problem with Patel, the Sardar told him that he need not bother about the States because after the transfer of power the States peoples would rise, depose their Rulers and throw in their lot with the Congress."*³⁵³

Mountbatten, so his story continues, persuaded Patel to give up confrontation in favour of a compromise formula under which the rulers would hand over defence, external affairs and communications to India, and Congress, in exchange, would guarantee the Rulers' titles, privileges and personal property.

In supplying this account, which is not backed by any other evidence, Mountbatten sought credit for this successful formula under which almost all the States acceded to India by 15.8.47. Menon, on the

other hand, has claimed that the scheme was his and that he discussed it first with Vallabhbhai, who was "inclined to agree". Next day, to continue with Menon's version, Patel told Menon that Nehru too was in agreement, whereupon Menon "proposed that the active cooperation of Lord Mountbatten should be secured". Readily agreeing, Vallabhbhai asked Menon "to approach the Viceroy without delay". To Menon's "joy", the Viceroy "accepted the plan".³⁵⁴ Who speaks the truth? The author H. V. Hodson, to whom Mountbatten gave the account we have quoted, only says:

*So closely did Menon work both with Lord Mountbatten and Sardar Patel that it is difficult to be sure, from the records, in what sequence their key discussions occurred, or who originated ideas or actions in regard to the States at this time.*³⁵⁵

The dates of Vallabhbhai's lunch parties settle the question. Mountbatten, who – writes Hodson – "appears not to have concentrated on the States' problem before 3rd June",³⁵⁶ could have only had that alleged conversation with Patel after June 3, whereas Vallabhbhai's courtship of the Rulers had commenced a month earlier. The necessity for it was obvious earlier still, and even the far more radical Nehru had assured the princes in February 1947 that "neither the monarchical form of government nor the integrity of the states would be touched" by the transfer of power.³⁵⁷ Patel could not have possibly talked in June 1947 of the "States peoples rising and deposing their rulers", not even as a bargaining counter. Moreover, if he had talked in that vein, the Viceroy would have felt perturbed, not delighted, at Vallabhbhai taking over States. Mountbatten's story is only his peg for hanging a trophy that belongs to Menon.

Mountbatten's reference to the formula as "my scheme" may irritate students of history but it suited Patel, who would describe it to the Viceroy as "your offer". Menon, for his part, shrewdly suggested to Mountbatten that "the wounds of partition might to some extent be healed" if the Viceroy sold the scheme to the rulers and thereby enlarged the Dominion of India. If Menon's account is correct, Mountbatten was "deeply touched" by this picture.³⁵⁸ Though he does not say so, Menon may well have persuaded the Viceroy to own the formula and sell it to the princes as his.³⁵⁹

* * *

The formula was not entirely novel. Even the Mission Plan had spoken of "a Union of India, embracing both British India and the States, which should deal with...Foreign Affairs, Defence and Communications",³⁶⁰ and it is not surprising that Menon thought of

the three subjects after Vallabhbhai had thought of Menon, sent for him and offered him the Secretaryship of the new Department. There were moments before he accepted the Sardar's offer when Menon "was not quite sure how far we should hit it off together". He and the Sardar "had indeed got on well together...ever since [they had] met for the first time on 21 August 1946"; though much younger, Menon had been treated by Patel as an equal. Would this not change when, as Secretary, he became the Member's subordinate? Menon put his misgiving frankly to the Sardar, who "replied that the question did not arise at all and that I should not think along those lines".³⁶¹ Menon accepted Vallabhbhai's offer, but not before he had received Mountbatten's approval; and he remained the Viceroy's constitutional adviser, in which position there was work still to be done, especially in scrutinizing the draft of the Indian Independence Bill. Patel "kept his word". As Menon would acknowledge, he was given both respect and discretion:

*Having selected his men, [Patel] trusted them entirely to implement his policy. Sardar never assumed that he knew everything and he never adopted a policy without full and frank consultation. Whenever we entered into discussion, we did so as personal friends rather than as Minister and Secretary.*³⁶²

This quite exemplary attitude was also expedient, for without it there was no chance of mobilising the States in the seven weeks of paramountcy that were left. Vallabhbhai's strategy also required, firstly, that Mountbatten be fully enlisted and, secondly, that the "rulers should not be rubbed the wrong way".³⁶³ We have noted already that the first condition was fulfilled. "Lord Mountbatten's direct and personal assistance in securing accession was asked for" – by Patel, by Nehru and by Menon, each making his own approach. Eager for as active a role as possible, the Viceroy "certainly welcomed the request"³⁶⁴ and thus became a member of the team of four that brought about the States' accession – Vallabhbhai, Nehru and Menon being the other three. The Sardar was undoubtedly the captain of this team but each of the others was indispensable to its success.

On July 5 Patel came out with his policy statement, its wording designed to reassure and lure the princes. The statement mentioned the subjects of accession and went on to say:

We ask no more of the States than accession on these three subjects in which the common interests of the country are involved. In other matters we would scrupulously respect their autonomous existence.

This country...is the proud heritage of the people who inhabit it. It is an accident that some live in the States and some in British India....None can segregate us into segments....I suggest that it is better therefore for us to make laws sitting together as friends than to make treaties as aliens.

*I invite my friends the rulers of States and their people to the councils of the Constituent Assembly in this spirit of friendliness.... Congressmen are no enemies of the princely order.*³⁶⁵

Not that there was a limp fist inside Vallabhbhai's velvet glove. Confronted by Patel and Menon when he wished to be left alone and ignored when he wished to be consulted, Corfield left India in July.³⁶⁶ Patel informed the princes that the Government's terms would be stiffer after August 15 and that there was a limit to his capacity to restrain foes of the princely order. And he pressed Mountbatten.

*Patel: I am prepared to accept your offer provided that you give me a full basket of apples. Mountbatten: What do you mean? P.: I'll buy a basket with 565 apples, but if there are even two or three missing the deal is off. M.: If I give you a basket with say 560 apples will you buy it? V.: Well, I might.*³⁶⁷

Courtship, however, continued. On July 10 a number of rulers, including the Maharajas of Patiala and Gwalior, were invited to 1 Aurangzeb Road. A larger group of rulers and their ministers assembled at Vallabhbhai's residence a fortnight later and indicated the desire to accede. Next day Mountbatten played his part to perfection. Facing the states' rulers at "a splendid occasion, with the Crown Representative in full uniform and the Princes in their jewelled finery",³⁶⁸ he addressed them without notes:

The Indian Independence Act releases the States on 15th August from all their obligations to the Crown. The States have complete freedom – technically and legally they are independent. But there has grown up during the period of British administration a system which meant that the subcontinent of India acted as an economic entity.

That link is now to be broken. If nothing can be put in its place, only chaos can result and that chaos, I submit, will hurt the States first.

The States are theoretically free to link their future with whichever Dominion they may care. But may I point out that there are certain geographical compulsions which cannot be evaded? Out of something like 565 States, the vast majority are

irretrievably linked geographically with the Dominion of India...

I am sure you will agree that [the] three subjects [of accession] have got to be handled for you for your convenience and advantage by a larger organisation.

The draft Instrument of Accession provides that the States can accede on three subjects only [and] without financial liability. Further, the Instrument contains an explicit provision that in no other matters has the Central Government any authority...

But I must make it clear that I have still to persuade the Government of India to accept it. If all of you would cooperate with me and are ready to accede, I am confident that I can succeed in my efforts.

Remember that the day of the transfer of power is very close at hand, and if you are prepared to come in, you must come in before 15th August.³⁶⁹

A lesson in persuasive eloquence, the speech probably owed a little to the fact that Jinnah had shocked Mountbatten a few days earlier by telling him that he was not wanted as Pakistan's first Governor General. Nehru and Patel had invited him to be that for independent India, and Mountbatten was so certain of an equivalent word from Pakistan that, at his instance, the draft of the Indian Independence Bill had stated that the existing Governor General would become Governor General of each of the two Dominions. Jinnah's "bombshell" – as Mountbatten described it to the Secretary of State³⁷⁰ – wounded the Viceroy and may have augmented the zeal with which he assisted Vallabhbhai and Nehru.

It mattered to the princes that Patel and Nehru had asked Mountbatten to stay on. When the Nawab of Bhopal asked the Viceroy whether the Government of India could be counted on to honour the Instrument of Accession, Mountbatten replied that "he would be in an extremely strong position to expose them if they did not, since he was remaining as Governor General until April".³⁷¹ By requesting Mountbatten to stay on, Vallabhbhai and Nehru secured his salesmanship for accession.

Acknowledging that Gwalior was the first State to announce accession and Baroda the first to sign it, Menon adds, however, that "the greatest share of the credit for giving a patriotic lead to the rulers must go to Sadul Singh of Bikaner and Yadavindra Singh of Patiala".³⁷² He thus links three of the great strands of Indian history – Maratha, Rajput and Sikh – to the events of 1947 whereby, for the first time in several hundred years, India was welded into a constitutional unity. If accession was a risk, not to accede seemed a greater risk. Patel's successors were not likely to offer better terms. If Congress's

socialist wing gained ascendancy, the terms would be disastrous. It was prudent to sign before August 15, before the Sardar raised his price. Travancore was among the States that acceded before the end of July and there was a rush of princely signatures in the first week of August. By August 15, to quote Hodson's graphic observation,

*apart from the few States clearly destined to adhere to Pakistan, every one both great and small bar only three had signed Instruments of Accession – a very full basket of apples, though two of the missing States were very large apples indeed.*³⁷³

In Menon's view, Vallabhbhai's "masterly" handling of the princes was "the foremost factor in the success of the accession policy". Though 72 and far from robust, he seemed to the rulers "a stable force" who would give and honour "a fair deal" and an iron man who was also "unfailingly polite".³⁷⁴

* * *

Kashmir and Hyderabad were the big apples missing. Junagadh, the third State that refused to sign, was small but the significance of its choice was not. We will come in due course to the stories of these three, and meanwhile look at three others that made temporary trouble.

Bhopal. Nawab Hamidullah asked for a postponement of the deadline but Patel was unwilling to grant it. In view, however, of Mountbatten's friendship with the Nawab, the Sardar agreed to a special arrangement.

Mountbatten to the Nawab of Bhopal, 11.8.47: *Dear Hamidullah, I have obtained Sardar Patel's consent to [this] course, namely that if you will sign and date the Instrument of Accession and the Standstill Agreement* before midnight on the 14th August and then hand them personally to me I will lock them up in my private case and undertake not to deliver them to the States Department until 25th August, unless you authorise me to deliver them earlier.*

I will further undertake to hand them back to you any time up to the 25th August should you change your mind and not wish to accede. I need hardly point out the need for absolute secrecy over this special treatment.

* Conditional on a State's accession, this relieved the State by providing for the continuance of all subsisting commercial agreements between the State and Indian authorities.

*My private but most earnest advice, Hamidullah, is that you should sign.... Yours ever, Dickie.*³⁷⁵

The device enabled the Nawab to claim, and the Sardar to deny, that he had received an extension. Acting as advised, Hamidullah signed the papers and delivered them to Mountbatten. The Nawab not recalling them, the papers were given to Patel and Menon on August 25.

The Nawab of Bhopal to Patel, August 1947: I do not disguise the fact that while the struggle was on, I used every means in my power to preserve the independence of my State. Now that I have conceded defeat, I hope you will find that I can be as staunch a friend as I have been an inveterate opponent.

*Patel to the Nawab of Bhopal: I do not look upon the accession of your State as either a victory for us or defeat for you. It is only right and propriety that have triumphed in the end, and in that triumph you and I have played our respective roles.*³⁷⁶

Indore. The holdback of Maharaja Yeshwant Rao Holkar of Indore is revealed in a letter he wrote to Nehru on August 6, in which he protested at being "rushed into accession", sought fresh clarifications and assurances from "you and Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel" and asked for time to examine "Pakistan's terms for an instrument of accession".³⁷⁷ "Indore and Bhopal," he told Nehru, "will follow a common policy."³⁷⁸

On August 4, the Maharaja and the Nawab had met Mountbatten together. At this meeting the Viceroy claimed with a straight face that the Instrument of Accession "had been drafted by himself".³⁷⁹ Earlier, Mountbatten had truthfully recorded the fact that "V. P. Menon has drafted" it.³⁸⁰ Added the Viceroy:

*Sardar Patel, incidentally, has informed me that he is indifferent to the action that Indore takes. Sufficient States have already decided to accede for Sardar Patel's purposes.... I am being attacked as pro-Prince. Sardar Patel is being similarly attacked.... In my private opinion, Sardar Patel will not be able to afford to remain conciliatory after 15th August.*³⁸¹

A few days later, the States Department received an ordinary postal envelope containing the Instrument of Accession signed by Yeshwant Rao.³⁸²

Jodhpur. Maharaja Hanwant Singh shared with the rulers of Bhopal and Indore their reluctance to accede. According to Hamidullah, who supplied, on his "word of honour", the "true

version of events" to Mountbatten, the Maharaja of Jodhpur came to Hamidullah's Delhi residence on "about the 6th August" and said that "he was particularly anxious to meet Mr Jinnah as quickly as possible to know what terms Mr Jinnah would offer". Some hours later Hamidullah and Hanwant Singh "drove together to Mr Jinnah's house". Asked by Hanwant Singh to state his terms, Jinnah said: "We are ready to come to treaty relations with the States; and we shall give them very good terms, and we shall treat them as independent States." Jinnah and the Jodhpur ruler then "discussed certain details about port facilities, railway jurisdiction and the supply of food, arms and ammunition".³⁸³

Hamidullah's account stops there but the meeting he refers to was quickly followed by another discussion between Jinnah and the Jodhpur ruler, who was accompanied this time by the Maharajkumar of Jaisalmer, which also abutted Pakistan. Hanwant Singh was "prepared to line up with Pakistan" but before signing asked the Maharajkumar of Jaisalmer whether he would follow suit. The latter said he would do so on one condition: he should be free not to side with the Muslims against the Hindus if there was trouble between the two. Shaken by his brother prince's reaction, Hanwant Singh asked Jinnah for time.³⁸⁴ On August 11 he told Hamidullah that "he could not leave the Union of India".³⁸⁵

That day Hanwant Singh signed the Instrument in the presence of the Viceroy, to whom Menon had taken him, but not before he had extracted a letter conceding some of his demands. Then, on Mountbatten leaving the room,

*the Maharaja – writes Menon – whipped out a revolver, levelled it at me and said, "I refuse to accept your dictation."... "Don't indulge in juvenile theatricals," I admonished him.... Presently the Maharaja returned to normal and we departed in company. After leaving him at his residence, I returned to office.*³⁸⁶

From the end of June 1947 until Patel's death, Menon saw him "at least twice a day", once in the morning, when he would "ascertain the Sardar's views and obtain his decisions", and again in the evening, when he would report on their implementation. Adds Menon:

*As if this were not sufficient, he would ring me up between 9.30 and 10 every night. I had to give him a sort of "All Quiet on the States' Front" and only then could he get to sleep.*³⁸⁷

Another civilian, H. M. Patel, was seeing Vallabhbhai almost as regularly and for work that in some ways was even more demanding. H.M. represented India on the two-man Steering Committee charged

with settling the mechanics of partition. The other member, who sat for Pakistan, was Chaudhri Muhammad Ali, like H.M. an official. Together they guided no less than ten expert committees, for much more than division of territory was involved. Civil servants, soldiers, railways, cash in treasuries, bank balances, records and archives, institutes, debts and more things had to be equitably shared. The experts worked round the clock. Disagreements went to H.M. and Muhammad Ali. If the two could not resolve them, the questions went to a Partition Council, on which India was represented by the Sardar and Prasad, with Rajaji as alternate member, and Pakistan by Jinnah and Liaquat, with Nishtar as alternate member.

Vallabhbhai, in other words, was India's Member for Partition as well, with H.M. as Secretary. Formed towards the end of June, with India's division less than 50 days away, the Partition Council met sixteen times before August 15 and continued until December. "Present at every single meeting,"³⁸⁸ the Sardar never relaxed his vigilance. The decisions and reports of the Partition Council and its committees fill thirteen volumes. More remarkable, however, is the fact that the decisions were agreed ones and that none of them had to be considered by an Arbitral Tribunal that was also set up, with Sir Patrick Spens, the retiring Chief Justice of the Federal Court, as its president. Alike for the size of the task they tackled and the spirit in which they tackled it, the expert committees and the two officials who steered them extort our admiration, but of greater relevance to us is H.M.'s assessment of Vallabhbhai's role. After referring to the "farsightedness, generosity and breadth of mind" that the Sardar displayed in the Partition Council, and recalling that he "made himself available for consultation at all hours", H.M. adds:

*It was he who made decisions on behalf of India, and in saying this no injustice is being done to his other colleagues, Dr Rajendra Prasad and Shri Rajagopalachari.... With an almost unerring instinct he knew precisely what the right course was, and it can be said that we have gone wrong only where we somehow succeeded in persuading him against his own instinctive view.*³⁸⁹

Though in the end agreement was reached on every question, the mercury rose on occasion. Recorded Mountbatten:

When Liaquat asked that one of the six Government Printing presses should be moved from Delhi to Karachi,...Patel flared up. He said that all six presses were fully occupied with Government of India work and could not be spared. When I appealed to him to release at least one press, even if it meant inconvenience to the Government

of India, he flared up again and said, "No one asked Pakistan to secede."³⁹⁰

* * *

"You saw his face," Kripalani would say later of Patel. "It grew year by year in power and determination."³⁹¹ "A few, very few have grown in stature over the years and have left their mark on events. Among these latter chosen ones stands Vallabhbhai Patel," said Jawaharlal.³⁹² Kripalani's remark was made after the Sardar's death, Nehru's in 1945, a year before Vallabhbhai took up the burdens of office. The feature underlined by both, Patel's refusal to stop growing, was linked to his broad shoulders, which never hesitated to bear fresh weights. He was 71 when he accepted the States' question as his own, nearly 72 when all but three apples were secure in the sack that he heaved across one shoulder, balancing it with the Partition Council carried on the other shoulder. "Inevitably some of the heaviest burdens fell on him," Nehru would afterwards record.³⁹³

Another task had to be completed in the final fortnight before freedom: choosing free India's first Cabinet Ministers and Governors. Patel performed it jointly with Jawaharlal. The hyper-active Viceroy hoped and indeed strove to join the selectors as a third member. As constitutional Governor General, he told Nehru, he would of course have to accept the names that Nehru put to him, but he hoped to be allowed to give some advice. According to Mountbatten, Nehru replied that "he would always look to me for advice."³⁹⁴

On August 4, after listening to Vallabhbhai and Mountbatten, Nehru submitted his names. In addition to his own and that of Patel, who was designated Deputy Prime Minister, they included Prasad, Azad, Matthai, Baldev Singh, Jagjivan Ram and Bhabha, who were members of the Interim Government, plus Rafi Ahmed Kidwai, Rajkumari Amrit Kaur, B. R. Ambedkar, Shanmukham Chetty, Shyama Prasad Mookerjee and N. V. Gadgil, who were new. The Cabinet of 14 had two Muslims, two Christians (Amrit Kaur was the second), two Scheduled Caste (Ambedkar and Ram), one former Raj loyalist (Chetty), two former (and future) foes of Congress (Ambedkar and Mookerjee) and seven in all, including Amrit Kaur, who were not members of Congress.

Five of the fourteen – Prasad, Ram, Bhabha, Mookerjee and Gadgil – were closer to Vallabhbhai than to Nehru. Five were equidistant – Matthai, Singh, Amrit Kaur, Ambedkar and Chetty. Azad and Kidwai were definitely closer to Jawaharlal. The line-up gave the Sardar great influence but he knew that Nehru was not only Prime Minister but also

a darling of the people in a way that he could never be. Outvoting him in the Cabinet was out of the question. This realization, along with the Cabinet line-up and Vallabhbhai's hold on the party, produced the Nehru-Patel duumvirate that would administer India from independence until the Sardar's death.

Mountbatten had pressed Nehru to "get rid of a lot of top-weight like Rajagopalachari and Maulana Azad" and also that "dear old man, Rajendra Prasad"³⁹⁵ but C.R. was the only one to be excluded. Vallabhbhai had put it to him, no doubt with Nehru's consent, to go as Governor to West Bengal, and Rajaji had agreed. Such a move by the Sardar seems surprising at first sight, for C.R. had given valuable support to Patel throughout the political negotiations of 1946 and 1947. Yet persuading Rajaji to go to Calcutta would have made Mountbatten happy, always a consideration with Vallabhbhai. Moreover, Rajaji was closer to Nehru on the Hindu-Muslim question, which remained live despite the assent to Pakistan.

Over Azad, too, Patel backed Mountbatten. Gandhi wrote to Nehru on July 24 that the Sardar was "decidedly against the Maulana's membership in the Cabinet", adding that he agreed with Vallabhbhai,³⁹⁶ but Jawaharlal, who could be firm when he chose to, retained the Maulana. Patel's agreement with Mountbatten on excluding Azad and C.R. suggests that messages may have passed, perhaps via Menon, between the two.³⁹⁷ However, Mountbatten's desire to see "a crowd of really good young men" in the Cabinet, without which he feared "Congress really will be finished within a year", did not have Vallabhbhai's support and was not fulfilled.³⁹⁸

In the politically significant selection of Ambedkar and Mookerjee, Patel's was undoubtedly the decisive role. Rajaji was perhaps the first to propose Ambedkar's name³⁹⁹ but Vallabhbhai had kept him in his sights since the summer of 1946,⁴⁰⁰ and it must have been with his approval, if not at his initiative, that Shankarrao Deo and N. V. Gadgil, leaders of the Maharashtra Congress, wooed Ambedkar at the end of 1946.⁴⁰¹ On July 1, 1947, five weeks before he was asked to join the Cabinet, Ambedkar came for tea to 1 Aurangzeb Road at Patel's invitation. Mookerjee, who represented the Hindu Mahasabha, had gained the Sardar's favour by demanding Bengal's partition in March 1947 and by refusing to join an abortive bid for a united and independent Bengal that Sarat Bose and Suhrawardy made in April and May.

* * *

In Punjab, meanwhile, knives were being sharpened and swung, petrol poured and lit, guns cleaned and triggers pulled. The Governor,

Evan Jenkins, told Mountbatten on August 2 that roughly 1,200 Muslims and 3,800 Sikhs and Hindus had been killed since March 4, when the rioting began. Another 3,000, half of them Muslims, had been seriously injured. The worst carnage in March was in Rawalpindi, with Sikhs the chief victims. After a comparative lull in April and most of May, killings started again and spread to new areas. Neither Patel nor Nehru nor Jinnah nor Liaquat had expected the bloodletting; all had hoped that separation would bring peace. "I don't care whether you shoot Muslims or not, it has got to be stopped." So Jinnah said to the Viceroy on June 23, while "begging the Viceroy to be absolutely ruthless in suppressing disorder".⁴⁰² Vallabhbhai and Nehru spoke likewise and demanded martial law, but Jenkins and the senior military commanders argued, and Mountbatten agreed, that martial law would not help. Magistrates and the rest of the civil structure would still need to be used; troops would be helpless against cloak-and-dagger tactics; soldiers might desert rather than shoot rioters from their community, even as policemen in hundreds were doing; ruthlessness would hurt the innocent more than the guilty.

Patel accused the Raj of shirking. "The British had little difficulty," he said bitingly to Mountbatten, "when it was a question of putting down Indian freedom movements."⁴⁰³ But the truth was that the Raj had finally agreed to heed his earlier call. It was quitting India. A decision "was deliberately taken" to "withdraw British troops from active service and... repatriate them before the transfer of power". The empire was not prepared to risk any large number of British lives in an effort to keep the peace in Punjab, though it would allow "a few hundred British civilian and military officers" to remain in Punjab through Independence Day.⁴⁰⁴

From August 1, in response to Indian and Pakistani urgings, a newly-created Punjab Boundary Force under the command of Major-General T. W. Rees was placed along the "border" which Sir Cyril Radcliffe's Boundary Commission would delineate only around August 15. The PBF had British, Hindu, Sikh and Muslim officers; its 55,000 men did not include any Briton. Despite its size the PBF only amounted to a little more than one soldier per square mile. Murderous groups avoided its arm and killings soared as the day of partition approached. The PBF proved helpless. Noting "pre-medieval ferocity", Rees would add:

*Neither sex nor age was spared. Mothers with babies in their arms were cut down, speared or shot, and Sikhs cried "Rawalpindi" as they struck home. Both sides were equally merciless.*⁴⁰⁵

Patel, Home Member of the Government of India, could do nothing about the lawlessness. Lying just across the limits of the city of Delhi,

Punjab's Gurgaon district burned at the end of May. Its Deputy Commissioner, a Briton called Brendon, put several Hindu advocates in prison as hostages for men whose pleas for bail they had sponsored. Everything inside Patel – the Home Member, the Hindu, the former lawyer, the one who remembered the arrogance of white officers he had encountered decades earlier – seethed.

In the course of a tour of the district, where he came across cases of “arson and counter arson, killings and counter killings”, Vallabhbhai caught up with Brendon and asked him if he had acted as alleged. The official denied the charge, whereupon Patel – the criminal lawyer of Godhra, Borsad and Ahmedabad – confronted Brendon with a piece of paper. It was a bail application with “a curious endorsement” in Brendon's writing. The Deputy Commissioner owned his error and the advocates were released but the Raj delayed Brendon's transfer by several weeks despite Patel's insistence on it.⁴⁰⁶ The Home Member was helpless.

Radcliffe's awards produced a fierce conflict in Vallabhbhai and also in Jinnah and Liaquat. Members of the Partition Council had pledged themselves on July 22 to “accept the awards whatever they might be” but early in August, before the awards were known, Liaquat sent Mountbatten “a strongly worded oral message” warning against the allotment of Punjab's Gurdaspur district or any large part thereof to India.⁴⁰⁷ Then, on April 13, when Radcliffe's decisions were still unknown, Patel sent Mountbatten his strongly worded message – in writing:

A deputation of the Chittagong Hill Tribes saw me this morning and expressed to me their grave apprehension that their area was going to be included in East Bengal...

I have told them that the proposition was so monstrous that if it should happen they would be justified in resisting to the utmost of their power and count on our maximum support in such resistance.

*Any award against the weight of local opinion and of the terms of reference or without any referendum to ascertain the will of the people concerned must, therefore, be construed a collusive or partisan award and will have, therefore, to be repudiated by us.*⁴⁰⁸

Ninety seven per cent of the quarter million living in the Chittagong Hill Tracts were non-Muslim tribesmen and Vallabhbhai had himself signed a representation to the Radcliffe Commission urging the area's inclusion in India, yet the intelligence he had received proved to be correct. Without giving any reason, Radcliffe awarded the Tracts to East Bengal. Bengal's retiring Governor, Frederick Burrows, argued that “the whole economic life of the Tracts depended upon East

Bengal, and they had no communication with Assam save a few indifferent tracks through the jungle",⁴⁰⁹ but Patel was unshaken in his stand. However, his July 22 promise as well as migrations and massacres staring him in the face, Vallabhbhai agreed, when the awards were shown to him on August 16, to implement all of them. So did Liaquat, though he and the League resented Radcliffe's decisions for the districts of Gurdaspur and Ferozepore.

"Now only tomorrow remains," Patel wrote to Gandhi on August 13. "Then the new order comes into force."⁴¹⁰ Vallabhbhai's last day in unfree India was not very different from preceding ones. It started before 5 a.m., included a walk in Lodi Gardens, working sessions with Jawaharlal, Menon and Shankar, and a string of interviews and meetings. The Congress party in the Constituent Assembly met at 3 p.m. At 7 p.m. the new Cabinet met informally at Nehru's residence. Other hours were given to politicians, princes and officials who called. There seemed not a moment for looking back at the 29 years and seven months that had passed since his decision to join Gandhi and assist him in wresting liberty. The Mahatma himself had slipped away to Calcutta in a bid to save Bengal from going Punjab's way. There was no space, in Patel's packed day, for any conscious reflection on loved ones and companions who had gone, or on the dream about to be fulfilled, or on the fires of hate illumining the emergence of free India, or on the greatness and wonder, nonetheless, of what was emerging. Vallabhbhai's eyes and ears took in the day's details, his mind ticked away and his tongue sallied and slashed, but there was no time to cup an ear against history.

A few days earlier, however, he had paused to note what was about to happen. "On the 14th, at 12 o'clock," he wrote to a friend in Ahmedabad, "British rule in India will cease to exist. Often did we court jails, many of us died heroically, and this is to be the fruit." The sense of pride crumbled, however, before a stronger sense of gratitude, and he added: "God's bounteous grace has kept us alive to see this day."⁴¹¹

At 10 p.m. he and Manibehn went to Prasad's residence, where they were invited for prayers organized by the ladies of the family. Soon crowds were spilling over from Prasad's rooms and lawn and it was with difficulty that they got out of the house. By now the roads too were filled with vehicles and people and it took them half an hour to get to the Constituent Assembly. Kripalani's wife Sucheta sang the first verse of Vande Mataram; Prasad, the Assembly's President, Khaliqzaman of the Muslim League, and the eloquent Radhakrishnan spoke. Jawaharlal made his noble and memorable Tryst-with-Destiny address. All that Vallabhbhai did was to join the other members, at the midnight hour, in a pledge of service. No one

else in the Assembly had played a greater role in the arrival of the hour, yet there is something apt about Patel making only a simple pledge on the occasion, his utterance lost in a multitude of voices and audible only to himself. Perhaps he was reminded of a like anonymity nineteen years earlier at Calcutta, shortly after the Bardoli victory.

The old warrior had trouble locating his car and driver after the ceremony and it was 1 a.m. when for the first time in his life, he reached home in independent India. "The nation is free of England's chains," Manibehn would enter in her diary. Vallabhbhai reached his bed, stretched his weary limbs and eased his head onto a pillow wrapped in khadi. Sleep may soon have come, but in the minutes or seconds until it did the agony and ecstasy of the past must have broken loose from his depths and, colliding with the miracle of the hour, flooded his tired eyes.

EIGHT
1947-48
CLIMAX



IT was in fear and trembling that the Hindus and Sikhs of West Punjab and the Muslims of East Punjab opened their eyes on the morning of August 15. Some of them were dead before freedom's opening day was over; around 200,000 would be killed before year-end. By the middle of 1948, about 5 1/2 million non-Muslims would move to India from West Pakistan and roughly the same number of Muslims from India to West Pakistan.¹ Recognizing a bitter reality ahead of everyone else, Patel said on August 16 – when Liaquat, Pakistan's first Premier, came to Delhi for a conference with Nehru, Patel, and Mountbatten – that “the only solution to the Punjab award was a transfer of population on a large scale”.² Kripalani had foreseen “no need for migration”: he calculated that, mindful of repercussions in India, Pakistan would protect its minorities.³ Violence had escalated since then, yet Liaquat maintained at the August 16 meeting that he would “stand up for the rights of the Sikhs in West Punjab”;⁴ neither he nor Nehru nor Mountbatten took up Vallabhbhai's suggestion. However, after 25 days and several thousand more deaths, the Government of India decided that “priority should be given to the transfer of refugees rather than the maintenance of law and order”.⁵ A month later India and Pakistan formally agreed that East and West Punjab should exchange their minorities.⁶

By this time the Great Migration had already taken place. On September 21 Patel and Manibehn had seen, from a plane, “refugees on the roofs of trains; lines, more than a mile long, of people and bullock-carts moving from east to west and west to east; and camps”.⁷ It is not certain that the mass exchange could have been peacefully implemented when Vallabhbhai first proposed it. Not only were the minorities reluctant, in the middle of August, to forsake their roots for a life elsewhere, there was neither the climate nor a machinery for shepherding them to the border and across it. In both Punjabs, the route to safety was dominated by a hostile majority, and the only neutral military force available, the PBF, was hopelessly overstretched. Moreover, every Muslim official in East Punjab and

every non-Muslim official in West Punjab was suddenly transferred from the ranks of helpers to those of the utterly helpless. His first concern was to move with his family to the other side, not to escort others. A fair part of the machinery of government had thus collapsed, and the rest had become fiercely partisan. A smooth exchange of minorities was a solution for happier times. The exodus took place nonetheless. En route to safety, thousands were slaughtered when their trains or convoys were attacked.

The evil that entered the subcontinent's bloodstream in 1947, turning neighbours into killers, also affected relationships between colleagues, making them less considerate and more touchy. When, on September 1, Patel, anxious about Hindus and Sikhs awaiting evacuation from West Punjab, asked Matthai to depute to Lahore a senior railway officer armed with the power to commandeer trains, Matthai sent a rude reply. The railway Minister's outburst was linked in part to Vallabhbhai's choice of words – the Sardar had conveyed an order rather than a request –, and in another part to Matthai's reluctance to delegate his authority, but it was also influenced by an account Matthai had received of the murder, before the eyes of inactive policemen, of 50 Muslims on a train from Kalka to Delhi. As Home Minister, replied Matthai, Patel should apply his mind to "preventing railway staff and passengers from being murdered".⁸ Implying that it was the Sardar's fault that hooligans were attacking trains in East Punjab, Matthai was also suggesting that the fault invalidated Patel's plea for help in rescuing West Punjab's Hindus and Sikhs. Since Vallabhbhai had been careless with him, Matthai would be graceless in reply, and also uncharitable and hardhearted. Such was the spirit of 1947.

No human heart could react with equal anguish to every cruelty of 1947 – neither Patel's nor Jawaharlal's nor Azad's. Vallabhbhai's was a Hindu heart. He was, unquestionably, roused more by a report of 50 Hindu or Sikh deaths than by another of 50 Muslim deaths. But his hand was just. Patel agonized over Hindu and Sikh suffering but punished Hindu and Sikh offenders, a sense of duty rather than his heart governing the Home Minister's hand.

Yet suspicion and bitterness had fouled the air of 1947, and while Vallabhbhai's frank tongue revealed his Hinduness, many an observer failed to see Patel's effort to enforce the law, or his anxiety to save Muslim lives. Sucheta Kripalani would, however, recall the "severe scolding" she received from the Sardar for releasing to the Press a report of horrors in Rawalpindi on Hindus and Sikhs. Before administering the rebuke, Vallabhbhai had ensured the suppression of the explosive report. "His searching eyes," says Sucheta, "were looking out for anything that may aggravate an already difficult situation, [and] his firm hand guided us."⁹

On September 2, when Nehru was in Lahore to explore a joint Indo-Pak response to the communal madness, Patel sent him a letter by courier:

From morning till night my time is fully occupied with the tales of woe and atrocities which reach me through Hindu and Sikh refugees from all over West Pakistan....These accounts are also being spread by word of mouth....You know the mass psychology. People are openly clamouring as to why Muslims are allowed to go about in peace openly in Delhi and other towns, why there are any Muslims at all in the police and the civil administration.

I am writing all this not in any extenuation of the folly of this attitude of mind, but only to make you acquainted with the temper of the people here. A goods train carrying baggage for the Pakistan government was burnt at Bahadurgarh. Attacks have taken place on Muslims walking on the road, going on cycles or in trains.

If things do not settle down quickly in West Punjab, the situation here and in other places may become beyond control.... The Pakistan government should be asked to put down lawlessness and disturbances with a strong hand.¹⁰

On his part Nehru sent word to Vallabhbhai that his joint tours with Liaquat on both sides of the border "have done much good" and that "everywhere Liaquat Ali and Nishtar have delivered strong and good speeches". In a public statement, Nehru emphasized that "the various governments" – two national and two in Punjab – "are acting in a spirit of cooperation in putting down lawlessness everywhere".¹¹ Nehru acknowledged what the leaders of Pakistan were doing; Patel warned of the consequences of their not doing enough. Nehru recognized the goodwill in Liaquat and Nishtar, Vallabhbhai the anger in the refugees from West Pakistan. Nehru's was "the voice of charity",¹² Patel's the note of reality. Each was right, each incomplete.

"Who could have thought," Gandhi had written to Vallabhbhai on August 30, "that you would have to face an ordeal like this so soon! May God give you the necessary strength and wisdom."¹³ On August 31 Patel went to Jullunder in a bid to protect and evacuate East Punjab's Muslims. "Both on my onward and return journeys," he wrote the next day to Nehru, "I saw several villages on this side of the Sutlej in flames"; he admitted the "savagery and atrocities" in East Punjab as well.¹⁴ Three days later Patel flew to Lahore where he, Nehru, Jinnah and Liaquat looked together at the evidence of the subcontinent's hates. It was not a proud moment for the leaders of liberation.

Gandhi, meanwhile, had been sharing a roof with Suhrawardy in one of Calcutta's crowded and riot-prone localities. Vallabhbhai rebuked him for living in "a ruffians' den" and for choosing Suhrawardy's company.¹⁵ Yet a contrast to Punjab was provided by Calcutta, with a huge crowd of Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs attending a prayer meeting that Gandhi called on August 18. However, violence started at the end of the month, provoking a fast by Gandhi that began on September 2, the day before Patel's trip to Lahore. On the fast's fourth day the 500-strong police force of North Calcutta, including British and Anglo-Indian officers, started a 24-hour sympathetic fast while remaining on duty. Peace returned, and on the night of September 5 Gandhi broke his fast by sipping juice from a glass handed to him by Suhrawardy.

That day Delhi caught Punjab's infection. "I will not tolerate Delhi becoming another Lahore," Vallabhbhai declared in Nehru's and Mountbatten's presence.¹⁶ He publicly threatened partisan officials with punishment,¹⁷ and at his instructions orders to shoot rioters at sight were issued on September 7. Four Hindu rioters were shot dead at the railway station in Old Delhi.¹⁸ Gandhi arrived in Delhi on the morning of September 9. Despite Patel's word to him that "you will not be able to put out the conflagration in Punjab",¹⁹ Gandhi had hoped to visit Punjab, but the Delhi disturbances detained him. The grim face of Vallabhbhai, who received him at Shahdara station, surprised Gandhi, as did the realization that he was being motored to Birla House: Bhangi Colony had been occupied by refugees from West Punjab. In the car a downcast Patel gave the Mahatma the facts of Delhi's lawlessness.²⁰ Later that evening, when Menon and H. M. Patel were conferring with Vallabhbhai at 1 Aurangzeb Road, a man rushed in to say that a Muslim had been butchered close to the house.

*In a voice charged with the deepest anguish – Menon has recorded – the Sardar exclaimed: "What is the point in waiting and discussing here? Why don't you get on with the business and do something?"*²¹

Next morning a Delhi Emergency Committee was formed, with H. M. Patel as its driving force and vice-chairman and C. H. Bhabha as chairman. Two young and able officials, L. K. Jha and K. B. Lall, joined the DEC as secretaries; and a dedicated team of officials and volunteers, men and women from several communities, took on three major tasks: protecting Delhi's Muslims; organizing camps for frightened Muslims leaving their homes in Delhi and the neighbouring areas; and setting up camps for devastated Sikhs and Hindus arriving in the capital from West Pakistan.

Vallabhbhai's own exertions continued. He supported and guided the DEC, calling frequently at its headquarters in Old Delhi's Town Hall. He toured the disturbed areas. He had four key officials reporting to him several times a day: Khurshid Ahmed Khan, Delhi's Muslim Chief Commissioner, M. S. Randhawa, the Sikh Deputy Commissioner, Banerjee, the Home Secretary, and Sanjeevi, the intelligence chief. He kept himself in steady and frank touch with Master Tara Singh, whose attitude was crucial in view of the Sikhs' thirst for revenge against Muslims, and in constant contact with army officers and Defence Minister Baldev Singh.²² On September 13 the Mahatma referred to the weight on Patel's spirits. "The Sardar always used to walk with his head high," he said, "but I tell you today he walks with his head bent."²³ Yet the battle against lawlessness was being won. Its character forever altered – a large segment of the capital's Muslim population had gone or was going and vast numbers of Punjabis, Hindus and Sikhs, had come in –, Delhi slowly limped back to peace.

Realizing that Mountbatten's experience of wartime emergencies would be of value, Vallabhbhai and Nehru asked him to head a Central Emergency Committee responsible to the Cabinet. This unusual and even unconstitutional proposal originated, it would seem, in Menon's mind. Patel agreed with it when Menon put it to him; so did Nehru; and Mountbatten acceded to the joint plea of the PM and the Deputy PM. The CEC did enormously useful work at a critical time, assisting with the flows of refugees, the movement of food, the disposal of corpses, the prevention of epidemics and other needs, but the admiral was guilty of gross and unbecoming, but not alas untypical, exaggeration when he claimed in later years that "Nehru and Patel asked him, in so many words, to take over the country".²⁴

Some Sikh and Rajput soldiers attacked Muslims in Delhi instead of protecting them. "We have lost control over our own soldiers," Vallabhbhai said to Devadas Gandhi. And he had the Madras regiment replace some units of the Sikh and Rajput regiments.²⁵ Shankar has given an account of Patel's anxiety for the Dargah of Nizamuddin Auliya in south Delhi:

Threats had been held out against the safety of the shrine. There was a state of panic among the hundreds of men, women and children who resided in the vicinity of the Dargah or had flocked to its safety. The Sardar wrapped his shawl round his neck and said, "Let us go to the saint before we incur his displeasure." We arrived there unobtrusively.

Sardar spent a good fortyfive minutes in the precincts, went round the holy shrine in an attitude of veneration, made enquiries here and there of the inmates, and told the Police Officer of the area,

*on pain of dismissal, that he would hold him responsible if anything untoward happened.*²⁶

However, Vallabhbhai was not going to tolerate Muslim misbehaviour or give up his no-nonsense attitude. Shots from a building under Muslim control whizzed past him on September 13 when, during a tour of the city, he stopped outside the Faiz Bazar police station. Told by a police officer that it was impossible to silence the snipers without blowing up the building, he merely said, "Blow it up".²⁷

* * *

A report reached Patel at the end of September that Sikhs in Amritsar intended to block and attack Muslim convoys that were about to trek past the city on their way to Pakistan. Apart from his responsibility, as India's Home Minister, for the Muslims' safe passage, Vallabhbhai was aware that on the other side of the border caravans of Hindus and Sikhs were making their way towards India. Blocking the Muslim convoys could have only one result. Deciding on his own to make a dash to Amritsar, Patel spoke there, on September 30, to Sikh leaders and Jathedars. Anger had blinded them to the link between the Muslims' safety and that of the India-bound Sikhs and Hindus. Vallabhbhai urged the Sikhs to see the link and appealed to their sense of honour: "I think it is in keeping with your dignity, reputation for valour and self-respect that you should raise a volunteer force which will [protect] these refugees." And he made a practical proposal: "Break the vicious circle of attacks and retaliation at least for a week." If the Pakistanis did not respond satisfactorily, India would take them to task. Finally, he held out a vision: "You (the Sikhs) can create in East Punjab the garden which you created in West Punjab by your efforts." His points going home, the Sikh leaders "pledged to hold themselves responsible for the safety of the big Muslim caravan which was to pass Amritsar in a few days".²⁸

A relieved Vallabhbhai was on his way to the airfield when thousands of refugees from West Punjab surrounded his jeep and demanded that he address them. Seeing "blood in the eyes of the refugees", Shankar suggested "that he might say that he would have to leave the airport before dark",²⁹ but Patel had chosen to face the crowd. Soon it swelled – to 1 1/2 to 2 lakhs, Manibehn, who was accompanying her father thought.³⁰ To it Vallabhbhai made one of the greatest speeches of his life:

Here, in this very same city, the blood of Hindus, Sikhs and Muslims mingled in the bloodbath of Jallianwalla Bagh. I am grieved to

think that things have come to such a pass that no Muslim can go about in Amritsar and no Hindu or Sikh can even think of living in Lahore.

The butchery of innocent and defenceless men, women and children does not behove brave men.... I am quite certain that India's interest lies in getting all her men and women across the border and sending out all Muslims from East Punjab.

I have come to you with a specific appeal. Pledge the safety of Muslim refugees crossing the city. Any obstacles or hindrances will only worsen the plight of our refugees who are already performing prodigious feats of endurance.

If we have to fight, we must fight clean. Such a fight must await an appropriate time and conditions and you must be watchful in choosing your ground. To fight against the refugees is no fight at all. No laws of humanity or war among honourable men permit the murder of people who have sought shelter and protection.

Let there be truce for three months in which both sides can exchange their refugees. This sort of truce is permitted even by laws of war. Let us take the initiative in breaking this vicious circle of attacks and counter-attacks.

Hold your hands for a week and see what happens. Make way for the refugees with your own force of volunteers and let them deliver the refugees safely at the frontier.³¹

Again the message went home. His action had been brave, his words candid, his plea realistic. No convoys were attacked after this speech, which marks a turning point in Punjab's story.

The inevitability of exchanging Punjab's minorities was accepted by Nehru but neither he nor the Mahatma nor Azad was prepared to agree with Patel's alleged wish to see the Muslims of Delhi, western U.P. and princely states like Alwar and Bharatpur also depart.³² Liaquat Ali, who had belonged until partition to western U.P., asked whether Vallabhbhai's Amritsar speech meant that India wanted to oust Muslims from areas other than East Punjab, and Jawaharlal clarified that an extended non-Muslim zone was "an impossible proposition".³³ Taxed by Gandhi with a report that he was "encouraging the idea of Muslims going away to Pakistan", Patel denied it indignantly. However, he told the Mahatma that Muslims not loyal to India should leave, and he could not help adding that he suspected a majority of disloyalty.³⁴

The idea of emptying great areas of India of Muslims, and Pakistan of Hindus and Sikhs, was against all that the Mahatma had stood for. The Punjab exchange tormented him; he had longed, earlier, to be able to avert it. Therefore he was miserable and full of self-reproach

when, on October 2, his 78th birthday, Vallabhbhai and Manibehn called on him. It was not even two days since Patel's Amritsar performance but Gandhi did not refer to it. He spoke only of "the sin I must have committed because of which I am alive to witness the violence around me". Vallabhbhai and Manibehn had left home "overbrimming with joy". They returned "with heavy hearts".³⁵

Gandhi's and Patel's hearts were yearning for different things. The ruler sought a solution, the Mahatma a miracle. Vallabhbhai was relieved that the caravans would pass unharmed, Gandhi anguished that they had commenced their journey. For Patel, a Muslim vacating his house spelt shelter for a Hindu or a Sikh refugee; for Gandhi it was new proof of his failure. But neither spoke against the other, and the Mahatma explained Vallabhbhai's position to Delhi's Muslims: the Sardar (said Gandhi) did not want loyal Muslims to leave India and was not one to "let his suspicions colour his actions".³⁶

If Vallabhbhai differed from Gandhi, he clashed with Azad. In this stressful time, each thought the other communal, and while Azad blamed Patel for plumping for partition and persuading Gandhi to acquiesce in it, Vallabhbhai could not forget the Maulana's inability to prevent the qaum's crossover to the League. By reducing the nation's Muslim percentage, partition had diminished Azad's influence, whereas the Sardar's had grown with independence; this shift in the Patel/Azad balance of power did not improve their relationship. After the August-September killings, both often laid claim to the same scarce resource – money or space or a quantity of tents or blankets or a protecting police unit –, Azad wanting it for Muslims in transit camps, Vallabhbhai for Hindu or Sikh refugees. When the Cabinet considered the question of houses vacated by Muslims in mohallas in Delhi that were predominantly Muslim, a majority agreed that the houses should first be offered to Muslims who had fled from their places but wished to remain in India. Believing that incoming Hindu and Sikh refugees had an equal right to the accommodation, Patel had opposed this proposal; Azad and Nehru had backed it.³⁷

There was a dispute over Delhi's Sikh Deputy Commissioner, Randhawa. Azad and Nehru told Vallabhbhai that Randhawa was not trusted by Muslims and should be transferred. "You have only to express your wish and I will execute it," Patel said to Nehru, but he added that the transfer would be "fraught with serious consequences". Replying that it was for Vallabhbhai with his "more direct sources of information" to decide, Nehru backed away.³⁸ So did Azad, but a week after Patel's Amritsar speech, the Maulana proposed a discussion with Vallabhbhai in Gandhi's presence. The three spent 75 minutes together on October 7, but the thorns in the Patel-Azad relationship were not removed.³⁹

Two days later Vallabhbhai went with Manibehn to Pataudi, in the district of Gurgaon, because the Nawab of Bhopal, whose daughter Sajida was married to the Nawab of Pataudi, was anxious about the couple's safety. After embracing the ruler of Pataudi, Patel asked him whether he wished to come to Delhi. The Nawab said that his place was with his people. His Begum said that her place was with her husband. Thereupon Vallabhbhai sent for the leading Hindus from the neighbouring villages and "pledged them to the security and safety of the family and the Muslims there". Returning to Delhi, he wired Nawab Hamidullah in Bhopal: "Situation well in hand. You need have no anxiety."⁴⁰

On October 11, Patel took an ill and coughing Gandhi to a meeting organized by Delhi's Gujaratis, who wanted to donate money for the Mahatma's Harijan fund. Asked to speak at the meeting, Vallabhbhai protested: "He is to receive the purse and I am to do the speaking – that is most unfair." "See," he went on, "how quickly the old man has recovered to relieve you of your money." "The Sardar will not miss a laugh even at the foot of the gallows," Gandhi exclaimed.⁴¹

On October 31, Vallabhbhai was again at Birla House, but Gandhi did not realize the day's significance. The next day he wrote to Patel: "You came and saw me yesterday but I did not then remember that it was your birthday. Therefore I could not give you my best wishes on the spot. Such is the sorry plight I am in."⁴² So far so good. But the Mahatma went on to ask the Government of India to declare that mosques would be protected, forcible conversion to Hinduism and Sikhism not recognized and no Muslim thrown out of India or his house. Gandhi wanted to allay Muslim fears but, conscious of Hindu and Sikh anger, Vallabhbhai did not like the advice. Though cordial banter survived, the Minister and the Mahatma were now on different wavelengths.

* * *

Patel had not forgotten, amidst the communal madness, the three apples missing from his sack – Hyderabad, Kashmir and Junagadh. An area of 82,000 square miles making it the largest of the princely states, Hyderabad possessed a population of 16 million (of whom 85 per cent were Hindu), its own coinage and paper currency and a Muslim ruler styled "His Exalted Highness". Muslims controlled the army and the public services. Britain had refused to consider the Nizam's plea for Dominion status but, largely on Mountbatten's urging, Vallabhbhai had granted Hyderabad three months' grace after August 15 for deciding on accession. No other State had been given such a concession, but Patel had instinctively realized that he would

obtain Hyderabad last. "I am striving for Hyderabad," he had written Gandhi on August 30. "It will take time."⁴³

If Hyderabad was in India's stomach, Jammu and Kashmir, almost as large as Hyderabad in area, though with one-fourth its population, lay strategically at the subcontinent's head, bordering China and Afghanistan and almost bordering the Soviet Union. Three out of four Kashmiris were Muslims, but its ruler was a Hindu. Jammu, which had a Hindu majority, and Ladakh, which was predominantly Buddhist, were distinct areas. Vallabhbhai was not quite sure that he wanted the Kashmir apple. Though significantly located, it was, after all, primarily Muslim, and Srinagar, its capital, was 300 miles away from the nearest Indian border. However, Radcliffe's partition of Punjab's Gurdaspur district had given India a road into Jammu. While taking no steps to obtain Kashmir's accession, and declining even to conclude a Standstill Agreement with it, Patel did, on his own, authorize an improvement of this road which in places was no more than a cart track.⁴⁴

Visiting Kashmir between 18th and 23rd June, Mountbatten had told Maharaja Hari Singh "that if Kashmir joined Pakistan this would not be regarded as unfriendly by the Government of India".⁴⁵ According to V. P. Menon, Mountbatten said to Hari Singh "that he had a firm assurance on this from Sardar Patel himself".⁴⁶ We should note that Mountbatten was quoting Vallabhbhai and not Nehru. Kashmir, the beautiful land of his forebears, was an apple that Jawaharlal did not want to lose. Nehru's attachment to Kashmir was intensified by his friendship with the State's popular leader, Sheikh Abdullah, a prisoner of the Maharaja when the latter hosted Mountbatten. Manibehn's diary records the contrast between the Sardar's perception of Abdullah and Nehru's: "Jawaharlalji came at 2.30 p.m. and gave the news of Sheikh Abdullah's release. Father gave him his opinion in one sentence."⁴⁷ Abdullah's release took place at the end of September but Hari Singh had not yet decided about Kashmir's future, though he had signed a Standstill Agreement with Pakistan.

That Kashmir would join India was the Mahatma's hope. Noting Abdullah's pro-Indian sentiment, Gandhi prayed that Kashmir would disprove the two-nation theory. Neither Gandhi's prayer nor Nehru's attachment was shared by Patel, who had been unenthusiastic about a visit that the Mahatma made to Kashmir in August. Gandhi declared after that visit that Kashmir was free to join either Dominion but in accord with the will of the people.⁴⁸ As for Vallabhbhai, he was content, according to Shankar, "to leave the decision to the Ruler". Evidently, Patel even said that "if the Ruler felt that his and his State's interest lay in accession to Pakistan, he would not stand in his way".⁴⁹ Menon's admission, in respect of the period before October 1947, that

“if truth be told, I for one had simply no time to think of Kashmir”,⁵⁰ strongly confirms the impression of Vallabhbhai’s passivity at this juncture regarding Kashmir

If the Sardar was indifferent, the Maharaja was unable to decide. Unwilling, as a Hindu, to accede to Pakistan, Hari Singh seemed equally reluctant to join India. He feared that the State’s Muslim majority might not like it, and he knew that he would not like the elevation of Abdullah, which Nehru was bound to ask for. Joining neither India nor Pakistan, he hoped for the acquiescence of both in Kashmir’s independence.

The third missing apple, Junagadh, was a seaboard State, east of Porbandar, in Kathiawad or Saurashtra, the thumb jutting out of western India and containing numerous States and fiefdoms. Over 80 per cent of Junagadh’s 7-lakh population were Hindu, and the famous temple of Somnath, sacked by Mahmud of Ghazni in 1024 AD, lay in its territory, but its ruler, Nawab Mahabat Khan, an eccentric who bestowed great affection and expense on the many dogs he kept, was a Muslim. He would probably have joined India but for a palace revolution that occurred, while he was in Europe, in May 1947. In the changeover, Sir Shah Nawaz Bhutto, a Muslim League politician from Sind, became the Dewan of Junagadh.

Bhutto was in close contact with Jinnah, who, as we have seen, was prepared to jettison his two-nation principle and accept a Hindu-majority State. Obeying Jinnah’s advice, Bhutto did nothing until August 15.⁵¹ On that day, Pakistan having come into being, Junagadh announced its decision to accede to it. The newspapers of August 17 brought the news to Patel, who asked the Ministry of External Affairs, which was in Nehru’s charge, to discover whether Pakistan intended to accept the accession. After shirking an answer for almost a month, the Government of Pakistan sent a telegram on September 13 stating that the accession had been accepted.

The accession and its acceptance represented a blow to the prestige of the Government of India in Kathiawad. It caused the region’s Muslims, about eleven per cent of the population, to look to the pocket and to Pakistan’s capital, Karachi, rather than to New Delhi; it generated a wish in Junagadh’s Hindu neighbours to retaliate against the Nawab’s regime and also against Muslims all over Kathiawad; and it raised an important question. If the Nawab and his Dewan could deliver Junagadh to Pakistan, could not the Nizam similarly offer Hyderabad? Above all, however, Junagadh was a pawn with which Jinnah hoped to get the Queen.

Kashmir was the Queen. If India argued, as Jinnah was sure it would, that not Junagadh’s ruler but its people should choose, he would make the same demand for Kashmir in case the Maharaja joined India. And in Kashmir an India-or-Pakistan option could easily

turn into a poll for and against Islam. 'This implication was plain, yet on September 30 Nehru told Liaqat in Mountbatten's presence that while India objected to the Nawab's accession, it would always be willing to abide by the verdict of a general election, plebiscite or referendum in Junagadh. Patel would not have volunteered such a commitment. Emphasizing Nehru's words to Liaqat, Mountbatten added an assurance that if the need arose Nehru would apply the principle to other States too, whereupon, in Mountbatten's words,

*Pandit Nehru nodded his head sadly. Mr Liaqat Ali Khan's eyes sparkled. There is no doubt that both of them were thinking of Kashmir.*⁵²

Vallabhbhai made it plain that a plebiscite in Kashmir would be conditional on one in Hyderabad. Not prepared for the latter, Jinnah offered no plebiscite in Junagadh.⁵³ It was up to Jawaharlal, as the External Affairs Minister, to talk with Pakistan over Junagadh but when it came to dealing directly with Junagadh, Patel functioned for India. Jawaharlal was fully included by him and the Cabinet's sanction obtained for all major moves but the direction of policy was in Vallabhbhai's hands. On September 19 he had sent Menon to Junagadh. Menon found the Nawab elusive and Bhutto evasive. On September 24, at Patel's instance, a brigade consisting of Indian troops and soldiers from some of the Kathiawad States was positioned near Junagadh's frontiers. On September 25, residents of Junagadh and other parts of Kathiawad gathered in Bombay and formed, with Vallabhbhai's knowledge, a provisional government for Junagadh, the Arzi Hukumat, with Samaldas Gandhi, a relative of the Mahatma, as its President. Rajkot became the Hukumat's headquarters.

Four weeks of waiting followed. Patel was giving time to Pakistan to annul the accession or arrange a plebiscite. If it did neither, he would act – not, to begin with, by sending forces into Junagadh proper, but by tackling three of Junagadh's feudatories, Manavadar, Mangrol and Babariawad. The latter two had already acceded to India, though the Sheikh of Mangrol alleged duress after freely signing the Instrument of Accession. The Nawab of Junagadh and the Government of Pakistan claimed that the feudatories lacked the discretion to accede, but Vallabhbhai disagreed. The Khan of Manavadar had not joined India but he had provoked his neighbours by arresting local leaders: the peace of Gondal State, which adjoined Manavadar, was endangered. On October 21 the Cabinet authorized the takeover of the three feudatories.

Mountbatten tried to argue against the decision; when he saw that the Sardar was firm, he urged that the Central Reserve Police rather than the Army be used. But Vallabhbhai was opposed to any

admission, direct or indirect, of qualms. Manavadar was taken over on October 22, the other two on November 1. Between the two dates, volunteers of the Arzi Hukumat crossed the border, causing the Nawab to flee to Karachi. He took with him his family, his dogs, the palace jewellery and all the cash in the State Treasury. On October 27 Bhutto wrote a pathetic letter to Jinnah:

Our revenue [has] gone to the bottom. Food situation is terribly embarrassing....His Highness and the royal family have had to leave....Our brethren are indifferent and cold. Muslims of Kathiawad seem to have lost all enthusiasm for Pakistan.

Responsible Muslims and others have come to press me to seek a solution of the impasse. I do not wish to say much more. My Senior Member of Council, Captain Harvey Jones, must have apprised you of the serious state of things.⁵⁴

On November 2 the Arzi Hukumat captured the town of Nawagadh. Five days later Bhutto sent the Briton, Harvey Jones, to Rajkot to request Samaldas to take over the reins of government. A day later, on November 8, Bhutto modified his request: would the Government of India accept the reins, rather than the Arzi Hukumat? The new proposal went to N. M. Buch, New Delhi's Commissioner for the States of Western India and Gujarat. Samaldas voiced no objection. Late that night Buch gave the news over the phone to Menon during a dinner at which Nehru and Mountbatten were also present. Prodded by Mountbatten, Jawaharlal and Menon drafted a conciliatory telegram for Pakistan, stating that the Government of India was acceding to Bhutto's request but would ascertain the wishes of the people of Junagadh before accepting the State de jure.

It was past midnight. Menon went to 1 Aurangzeb Road, woke Patel up and showed him the draft. The Sardar strongly objected to the offer of a plebiscite. It was "unnecessary and uncalled for", he said.⁵⁵ In his view, Nehru and Menon "were sissies to want to send any telegram at all". However, after a good deal of persuasion by Menon, Vallabhbhai agreed that the message might go, – "subject to the omission of anything that could possibly be interpreted as friendly".⁵⁶ Buch and an Indian Army officer, Brigadier Gurdial Singh, entered Junagadh on the afternoon of November 9, Captain Harvey Jones piloting their convoy. The State's soldiers were disarmed and reins taken over. Bhutto, however, had left the previous evening for Karachi.

Patel arrived in Junagadh four days after its surrender and spoke to a large crowd on the grounds of Bahauddin College. After complimenting Bhutto and Jones for their realism and the Indian forces for their restraint, he touched on Kashmir and Hyderabad:

*If Hyderabad does not see the writing on the wall, it goes the way Junagadh has gone.*⁵⁷

*Pakistan attempted to set off Kashmir against Junagadh. When we raised the question of settlement in a democratic way, they (Pakistan) at once told us that they would consider it if we applied that policy to Kashmir. Our reply was that we would agree to Kashmir if they agreed to Hyderabad.*⁵⁸

Stating that the Government of India would abide by the wishes of the people, Vallabhbhai asked the audience to indicate whether they desired the State to accede to India or to Pakistan. Thousands of hands were immediately raised for India, whereupon Patel said: "No appeal to outside authority or to force or to any international court will succeed in dislodging this popular verdict."⁵⁹ As far as Vallabhbhai was concerned the plebiscite was over! However, a referendum was duly held on February 20, 1948. Witnessing it, correspondents of London's *Daily Telegraph* and *Sunday Times* reported that it was properly conducted. Out of 201,457 registered voters, 190,870 exercised their franchise. Of this number only 91 voted for Pakistan. There was a separate but simultaneous poll in Manavadar, Mangrol, Babariawad and two other feudatories. Out of 31,434 votes cast in these areas, only 39 were for Pakistan.⁶⁰

When, on his way to Junagadh, Patel passed through Rajkot, its ruler, Thakore Pradyumnasinh, prudently took the opportunity to inform the Sardar that he would "fulfil the agreement between the Rajkot State and yourself arrived at on the 26th December 1938".⁶¹ The sender of this message was the brother and successor of Dharmendrasinh, who, along with his Dewan, Virawala, had blocked Vallabhbhai's wishes nine years earlier.

After the Junagadh rally the Sardar visited the Somnath temple at Prabhas Patan. With him was Gadgil, his colleague in the Cabinet. Both were "visibly moved to find the temple which had once been the glory of India looking so dilapidated, neglected and forlorn".⁶² Gadgil felt that the temple should be renovated. He mentioned the idea to Patel, who at once agreed and publicly proposed it. The Jamsaheb of Nawanagar, who was with them, donated a lakh of rupees on the spot, and Samaldas announced that the Arzi Hukumat would give Rs.51,000. Gadgil's Ministry, responsible for public works, undertook the task and the Cabinet approved, but after a discussion between Gandhi and the Sardar it was decided that a trust should renovate the temple with funds from the public.

Vallabhbhai told the Mahatma that "not a single pie would be taken from the treasury of Junagadh" or from the Government of India's resources. The two agreed that India's government was "not a theocratic one" and did "not belong to any particular religion".

It was “secular”⁶³ and temples should not be built or rebuilt by it. By the time Somnath was renovated, Patel, who had agreed to perform the inaugural ceremony, was dead. In his place President Rajendra Prasad discharged the role, ignoring objections voiced by his Prime Minister, Nehru.⁶⁴

* * *

Vallabhbhai's lukewarmness about Kashmir had lasted until September 13, 1947. That morning, in a letter to Baldev Singh, he had indicated that “if [Kashmir] decides to join the other Dominion”, he would accept the fact.⁶⁵ His attitude changed later that day when he heard that Pakistan had accepted Junagadh's accession. If Jinnah could take hold of a Hindu-majority State with a Muslim ruler, why should the Sardar not be interested in a Muslim-majority State with a Hindu ruler? From that day Junagadh and Kashmir, the pawn and the Queen, became his simultaneous concerns. He would wrest the one and defend the other. He would also defend Hyderabad, to him the King on the chessboard. Had Jinnah allowed the King and the pawn to go to India, Patel, as we have seen, might have let the Queen go to Pakistan, but Jinnah rejected the deal.⁶⁶

A series of steps were at once taken. At Patel's initiative, planes were diverted to the Delhi-Srinagar route, and wireless and telegraph equipment to both ends of the Amritsar-Jammu link. Telephone and telegraph lines were laid between Pathankot and Jammu.⁶⁷ Mehr Chand Mahajan, a Punjab High Court judge invited by Maharaja Hari Singh to be his next Prime Minister, was “practically ordered” by the Sardar “to accept the offer”,⁶⁸ sanctioned eight months' leave from the High Court and fully briefed.

Patel to Hari Singh, 21.9.47: *Justice Mehr Chand will convey to you personally the gist of our conversation on all matters affecting the interests of Kashmir. I have promised him full support and cooperation on our behalf.*⁶⁹

The Maharaja's foe in Kashmir, Sheikh Abdullah, had founded the Muslim Conference in 1930 and fought from its platform for democratic rights. In 1938 he and his colleagues changed the body's name to the National Conference. A frequent prisoner of the Maharaja's, Sheikh Abdullah was released, along with several of his colleagues, on September 29, 1947. We have noted Vallabhbhai's misgivings and Nehru's enthusiasm about him. These were paralleled by Nehru's distaste for Hari Singh, – whose prisoner, in the Sheikh's cause, he had briefly been in June 1946 – and by Patel's “abiding sympathy” for the Maharaja in his difficulties and

"the instinctive responsibility" he felt for "ensuring the safety and integrity" of his State.⁷⁰ Nonetheless, Vallabhbhai who as yet had met neither Hari Singh nor Abdullah, well knew, as did Nehru, that an understanding between the Maharaja and the Sheikh was crucial to peace in Kashmir and to the State's friendship with India.

In the last week of September, Nehru received reports, which he passed on to Patel, that forces in Pakistan were "making preparations to enter Kashmir in large numbers". Jawaharlal had gathered that "the Pakistan strategy is to infiltrate into Kashmir now and to take some big action as soon as Kashmir is more or less isolated because of the coming winter". The solution, as Nehru saw it, was "to bring about the accession of Kashmir to the Indian Union as rapidly as possible with the cooperation of Sheikh Abdullah".⁷¹ Despite his views on Abdullah, Vallabhbhai could not refute Nehru's reasoning.

On October 2, three days after Hari Singh had felt obliged to release Abdullah, Patel wrote to the Maharaja: "Sheikh Abdullah will be coming to Delhi shortly and we shall endeavour to reach a satisfactory solution to the difficulties which you have from that quarter. I shall then suggest to Your Highness how best we can proceed further."⁷² On October 21, after a series of talks with Abdullah, Vallabhbhai wrote to Mahajan, by now functioning as Kashmir's Premier, that the Sheikh, who seemed "genuinely anxious to cooperate... in dealing with the external dangers", wanted his hands "immediately strengthened" if he was "to do anything substantial". Describing this attitude as "understandable", Patel urged power-sharing between the Maharaja and the Sheikh, "without in any way jeopardising" Hari Singh's position.⁷³

Kashmir was invaded before Mahajan received the letter. On October 22, 5,000 armed tribesmen from Pakistan entered Kashmir in nearly 300 lorries, which also carried surplus arms and ammunition. The same day they seized and burnt the town of Muzaffarabad. Lt.-Col. Narain Singh, in command of the State Forces there, was shot by the Muslims of his battalion who deserted and joined the raiders and indeed, according to Menon, acted as their vanguard. A few days earlier, asked by the Maharaja whether he could count on the Muslim half of his battalion, Narain Singh had answered: "More than on the Dogras."⁷⁴ Brigadier Rajinder Singh, Chief of Staff of the State Forces, advanced with about 150 men towards the raiders and engaged them for two days at Uri. His objective was to delay the enemy's arrival at Baramula, the gate to the Vale of Kashmir and to Srinagar, the capital. The Brigadier and all his men were killed but precious time had been gained. On October 23, Mahajan wrote to the Sardar that "practically the whole of our Muslim military and police" had either deserted or refused to cooperate.⁷⁵ On October 24 the raiders captured the powerhouse at Mahura and switched off Srinagar's electricity. By the

night of the 24th they were close to Baramula and only 40 miles from the capital.

Chaudhri Muhammad Ali, Pakistan's leading civilian at the time and later its Prime Minister, revealed in 1967 that "on October 21 (1947) Liaqat Ali Khan told me in a state of unusual excitement that a tribal lashkar, some thousands strong, was on the way to Kashmir". "There was nothing the Government could do about it," Muhammad Ali added.⁷⁶ To go by Pakistan's official version at the time, atrocities allegedly perpetrated by Hari Singh's forces on the Muslims of Poonch in western Kashmir provoked a spontaneous march by Pakistani tribesmen into the Maharaja's territory.⁷⁷

However, according to Sir George Cunningham, Governor of the N.W.F.P. during the period in question, his province's Chief Minister, Abdul Qaiyum Khan, "was encouraging the tribesmen to go into Kashmir and even collecting...militia transport for a tribal invasion".⁷⁸ Qaiyum Khan's efforts may have been linked to Patel's September 24 decision to send a force to Junagadh's border, to the setting up, on September 25, of the Arzi Hukumat⁷⁹ and to the fear that, following Nawab Mahabat Khan's example, Maharaja Hari Singh might accede to the nation where his co-religionists formed the majority. But the Frontier Chief Minister was not the only Pakistani official preparing the raid into Kashmir, and at least one senior Pakistani General, Akbar Khan, has openly acknowledged his own and his country's involvement.⁸⁰

At a meeting with Mountbatten on November 1, 1947, Liaqat claimed that "any attempt by Pakistani authorities to interfere with the movement of tribesmen in defence of their fellow-Muslims would have precipitated trouble with the rest of the tribes on the Frontier",⁸¹ but this was contradicted by Jinnah's statement to Mountbatten the same day that if his conditions were satisfied he would "call the whole thing off".⁸² A mysterious 'General Tariq' leading the raiders was later identified as Major-General Akbar Khan.⁸³ He was assisted, we may note, by some Muslim ex-officers of Subhas Bose's Indian National Army. We should also mark that virtually all the Muslims in Hari Singh's forces, one-third of a total of about 8,000, went over with their arms to the attacking side. If this suggests previous planning, it also reveals the extent of Muslim alienation from the Maharaja's Government.

Though served by a few brave officers, the Kashmir regime was so ill-organized that it did not inform Delhi of the attack until the evening of October 24, when, on behalf of the Maharaja, "a desperate appeal was conveyed".⁸⁴ About the same time, General Lockhart, Commander-in-Chief of the Indian Army, received word from his Pakistani counterpart, also a Briton, that some 5,000 tribesmen had entered Kashmir on October 22 and were on their way to Srinagar.

The information reached Delhi three days after the Cabinet had endorsed Vallabhbhai's decision to move into Manavadar, Mangrol and Babariawad, and two days after Manavadar had been taken over.

On the morning of October 25, when the Defence Committee of the Indian Cabinet met, the Sardar was the clearest advocate of support to a Maharaja pleading for the life of his State; he had taken care, before the meeting, to include the Mahatma,⁸⁵ who may have agreed with him. Nehru's first reaction was that "the Maharaja should associate Abdullah with the resistance".⁸⁶ The Defence Committee's chairman was Mountbatten – an odd, unconstitutional but not, in the light of his military background and relationship with Nehru and Patel, surprising arrangement. Counselling restraint over both Junagadh and Kashmir, Mountbatten also questioned whether India could send soldiers to a State that had not acceded to it. Refusing to modify the Junagadh instructions, Vallabhbhai added firmly that as far as Kashmir was concerned "he saw nothing to prevent India from sending armed assistance", whether or not the State had acceded.⁸⁷ In the end the Committee decided that a quantity of arms, and V. P. Menon, should be flown immediately to Srinagar.

Arriving later that day (October 25) in Srinagar, Menon found "an atmosphere of impending calamity". The State police was nowhere to be seen. In some places lathi-carrying volunteers of Abdullah's National Conference challenged passers-by. Premier Mahajan had "lost his equanimity" and the Maharaja "was completely unnerved by the turn of events and by his sense of lone helplessness". Menon advised him to proceed forthwith, with his family and jewels, to Jammu, which was nearer India and farther away from the raiders.⁸⁸ After collecting such facts as he could, Menon flew back to Delhi early on the morning of October 26. Mahajan accompanied him. Abdullah, too, was in Delhi and had conferred with Patel and Nehru at 1 Aurangzeb Road the previous night.

At 3 p.m. on October 26 there was a crucial meeting at Nehru's house. Vallabhbhai, Nehru, Baldev Singh, Abdullah, Mahajan, Batra (Kashmir's Deputy Premier) and Menon were present. The Sheikh and Mahajan urged that Indian soldiers were instantly needed in Srinagar. Mountbatten's attitude and his own temperament caused Nehru, for all his feeling for Kashmir, to hesitate,* whereupon Mahajan, a staunch Hindu, said that Kashmir would seek Jinnah's terms if India did not respond. Jawaharlal reacted by asking Mahajan to "go away". The Kashmir Premier got up to leave but Vallabhbhai stopped him. "Of course, Mahajan," he said, "you are not going to Pakistan."⁹⁰

* According to Mahajan, Nehru said that it was "not easy on the spur of the moment to send troops".⁸⁹

Patel had made up his mind before Mahajan issued his pathetic threat. The attack from Pakistan called for only one response. Vallabhbhai's clarity and Abdullah's persuasion ended Nehru's indecision. Menon was directed to return at once to Kashmir and tell the Maharaja that the Indian Army was on its way.

It was not, however, a total defeat for Mountbatten. Vallabhbhai and Nehru agreed to two of his suggestions. One was that Hari Singh's accession should be secured before the troops were dispatched. The other was that the offer of a plebiscite, to be held once law and order had been restored, should be included in the acceptance of the accession. Patel found neither proposal appealing. The invasion of Kashmir was to him sufficient warrant for going to its aid. Also, Kashmir's accession to India could lead to greater exertions for securing Hyderabad's to Pakistan. As for a plebiscite, Vallabhbhai felt that reciprocity towards Pakistan was a sounder principle. Even so he yielded. It was sensible to let Mountbatten gain a point or two. Individual Britons still headed India's military services, and Pakistan's. Patel agreed, too, to Nehru's condition, which was that Abdullah should have a place of authority in Kashmir. It was the only way, Vallabhbhai realized, to enlist Kashmir's Muslims against the attack.

After a night-long ride, Hari Singh had reached Jammu on the morning of October 26, uttering on arrival "but one sentence, 'We have lost Kashmir.'"⁹¹ The Maharaja was asleep when Menon arrived in the afternoon. Woken up and informed of the Indian Government's decision, he signed the Instrument of Accession that Menon had brought, reiterated, in writing, his request for immediate military help, and agreed to install Abdullah at once as "Head of Administration" or de facto Premier alongside the de jure Premier, Mahajan. Patel conferred meanwhile with Baldev Singh, the Defence Minister.

That evening, after Menon's return to Delhi, it was decided to fly an infantry battalion to Srinagar. Officers at Defence Headquarters, Delhi, and civilians led by H. M. Patel, by now Defence Secretary, spent the night finding aircraft, pilots, arms and supplies. By the early hours of October 27, over a hundred planes, civilian as well as military, had been assembled. Pilots, again both Air Force and civilian, rose to the occasion; weapons and supplies were airlifted; and 329 men of the Sikh Regiment's 1st Battalion, led by Lt.-Col. Ranjit Rai, were in Srinagar before dusk. Menon has recorded the tension surrounding the first landing:

As it was not known whether the airfield had fallen into the enemy's hands, Lt.-Col. Rai was told to circle above it and, if there was any doubt, not to land but to fly back to Jammu. At 10.30 a.m., after tense

*suspense, a wireless flash from Srinagar airfield announced the safe landing of the first of our troops....The airfield was now in our hands.*⁹²

Vallabhbhai was at Willingdon airfield on October 27, watching a sortie start and another end, and awaiting the return of Menon, who had gone to Kashmir for his third trip in three days.⁹³ We may set this picture at Willingdon airfield of a determined yet anxious Patel against the eagerness and suspense of another man waiting for news from Kashmir, Jinnah, who had moved from Karachi to Lahore in readiness for a triumphal entry into Srinagar, which the tribesmen were expected to take on October 26 or 27. His private secretary, Khurshid Ahmad, was already there.

At midday on October 27 Jinnah heard that Indian troops had landed in Srinagar. The shock did not unsettle him. At once he instructed Sir Francis Mudie, Governor of West Punjab, to telephone General Gracey, acting Commander-in-Chief of the Pakistan Army, ordering him to move troops forthwith into Kashmir. Mudie obeyed Jinnah, but Gracey did not obey Mudie. He needed, Gracey correctly said, the approval of the Delhi-based Supreme Commander, General Auchinleck, who was in charge of all the British officers that remained, whether on the Indian or the Pakistani side. Auchinleck flew from Delhi to Lahore on the 28th and explained to Jinnah that while India had the right to send soldiers to Kashmir, which had acceded to it, Pakistan did not. If Jinnah nonetheless insisted on sending troops into Kashmir, he, Auchinleck, would remove British officers from both sides. Since Pakistan had a greater proportion of them, the step would hurt it more. Though remaining very angry, Jinnah cancelled his orders.⁹⁴

The Indian battalion secured the airport and advanced towards Baramula, 35 miles from Srinagar, to stop the raiders there. After checking them for a while, Rai realized that they had expert commanders, modern weapons and great numerical superiority. He decided to withdraw his men to Pattan, 17 miles from Srinagar; while retreating he was killed. By the end of October three more battalions of the Indian Army had landed at Srinagar, bringing to about 2,000 the number of Indian soldiers defending the State's capital.

The attackers were stopped and Khurshid Ahmed sent back to Pakistan, but Srinagar remained in threat. About 700 raiders made a sneak attack on Srinagar airport on November 3. They were engaged outside the airfield and repulsed but not without the loss of several Indian soldiers. Vallabhbhai made his first journey to Kashmir the following morning – five days after his 72nd birthday. He found Brigadier L. P. Sen, the new commander of India's forces, anxious⁹⁵ but also ingenious. Withdrawing his forces that day to a point five miles

from Srinagar, Sen tempted the raiders with the great prize of the capital. Advancing under the lure, the raiders bunched themselves into a rich target, which was not spared. A squadron of Indian armoured cars left Jammu the same day for Srinagar, 200 tortuous miles away.

Flying back after a tense morning, the Sardar, who was accompanied by Baldev Singh, stopped at Jammu, where Hari Singh and his Rani gave them lunch in their winter palace. It was Patel's first meeting with the Maharaja. On the Jammu-Delhi leg Vallabhbhai wrote 25-odd letters, most of them replies to senders of birthday greetings, but from Willingdon airfield he and Baldev Singh went straight to a meeting of the Defence Committee⁹⁶ where they pressed for reinforcements and a more vigorous effort and in particular for the capture of Baramula.

In the judgment of Sheikh Abdullah, scarcely an uncritical Patel fan, "events took a decisive turn" after Vallabhbhai's Srinagar visit. "The Sardar did not lose even one minute. He studied the situation and said that the enemy must be driven back."⁹⁷ Major General Kulwant Singh and several hundred soldiers were flown to Srinagar the next day. Taking over from Sen, Kulwant Singh freed Baramula on November 8. The town bore terrible marks of the raiders' "arson and pillage, loot and rape",⁹⁸ distractions that had delayed their advance and saved Srinagar. "Had the tribal lashkar been more disciplined," Chaudhri Muhammad Ali would later lament, "and had it not indulged in plunder on its way, it would have been in occupation of the Kashmir valley on October 26."⁹⁹

"In the last week of October 1947," Gadgil has recalled, Patel "took out a map and pointing to the Jammu-Pathankot area said that the 65-mile road between the two towns had to be made capable of carrying heavy army traffic within eight months." He had seen at once that the battle would be long. When Gadgil, the Minister for Works, pointed out that "rivers, rivulets, hills and mountains" were not so obvious on the map, Vallabhbhai said simply, "You have to do it." Around 10,000 workers were brought from Rajasthan in special trains. Floodlights enabled night work. Labour camps, dispensaries, mobile cinemas and markets supported the drive. The 65 miles were completed on time.¹⁰⁰

But the Hari Singh-Abdullah relationship did not improve. A formula to let the Sheikh run the Valley, leaving Jammu to the Maharaja, was not given a trial. Posted as India's Agent in Kashmir, Dalip Singh wrote to the Sardar from Jammu: "His Highness personally dislikes Sheikh Sahib, and Sheikh Sahib's endeavours to try and maintain authority in Jammu without reference to H.H. are merely causing friction."¹⁰¹ On November 22, Premier Mahajan sent his report to Vallabhbhai:

As advised I am quietly watching the trend of events without in any way interfering in the administration....Sheikh Sahib [has] got dictatorial powers which are being exercised in a dictatorial manner regardless of all rules and forms of law.¹⁰²

Patel flew again to Jammu on December 2 and tried, over another lunch at the palace, to promote cordiality between the host and Abdullah, who was present with his Begum. The bid was unsuccessful, for by now Abdullah wanted his de facto Premiership to be formally recognized. The Sheikh had the full support of Nehru, who wrote to the Maharaja on December 2:

Sheikh Abdullah should be the Prime Minister and should be asked to form the Government. Mr Mahajan can be one of the Ministers and can formally preside over the Cabinet. But it would introduce confusion if Mr Mahajan continues to be styled as Prime Minister. This Interim Government should be in full charge and you will be the constitutional head.¹⁰³

With this letter Nehru takes over the shaping of India's Kashmir policy, a role thus far played by Vallabhbhai as Minister for States and as one who instinctively stood guard beside any chink in India's security. Viewing Abdullah as the key to Kashmir's future and believing that Patel would mishandle him, Jawaharlal decided to manage Kashmir himself. The Sardar stepped aside the moment Jawaharlal expressed the wish to stand in his place. Going further, Vallabhbhai agreed to use his influence with the Maharaja for fulfilling Nehru's objectives in Kashmir. Thus when Nehru subsequently decided that Mahajan had to go – in violation of his word to Hari Singh that Mahajan could formally preside at meetings of Kashmir's new Cabinet –, Patel expressed his unhappiness but nonetheless wrote to Mahajan: "If your presence is an obstacle, I am sure you will not hesitate to accommodate them."¹⁰⁴

To assist him in handling Kashmir, Jawaharlal brought into the Cabinet, as Minister without portfolio, N. Gopalaswami Ayyangar, a former Dewan of the State and a constitutional expert. Apparently Vallabhbhai was not previously consulted about Gopalaswami's entry.¹⁰⁵ In any event, Patel did not realize that Gopalaswami would in effect function, under Nehru's direction, as Minister for Kashmir affairs or that instructions regarding Kashmir would henceforth be issued by Gopalaswami. Nehru had obtained Vallabhbhai's consent to two visits by Gopalaswami to Kashmir in the first half of December, but Patel had not understood Nehru's plans. While Vallabhbhai thought that he had agreed to an independent role by Nehru within the States Ministry, Jawaharlal assumed that Kashmir had been taken out of that

Ministry and could be delegated by him to Gopalaswami. The truth dawned on Patel when he saw a telegram from Gopalaswami instructing the Premier of East Punjab to release 150 motor vehicles for Kashmir. Vallabhbhai was not pleased. "This question," he told Gopalaswami, "should have been referred to and dealt with by the Ministry of States." "I would suggest," he added, "that the relative papers may now be transferred to the States Ministry and in future the Kashmir administration may be asked to deal with that Ministry direct."¹⁰⁶

Gopalaswami replied the same day that as a Member of the Cabinet he was unwilling to "act merely as a post office between a Ministry with a portfolio and persons and authorities outside". He had made, Gopalaswami added, two visits to Kashmir "at request". Still, in view of the Sardar's letters, he would disconnect himself "from all matters relating to Kashmir".¹⁰⁷ Gopalaswami was not at fault. He had been obeying the Prime Minister. Now he was willing to obey the Deputy Premier. It was Nehru's lack of frankness with the Sardar that had created the trouble. Appreciating that a Minister could not be content with a civil servant's duties, Patel wrote to Gopalaswami on December 23: "I would rather withdraw my letter and let you deal with matters as you deem best than give you cause for annoyance."¹⁰⁸

By this time Gopalaswami had sent copies of the December 22 letters to Nehru, who took great offence at Vallabhbhai's reaction and proceeded to lay down the law:

Gopalaswami Ayyangar has been especially asked to help in Kashmir matters. Both for this reason and because of his intimate knowledge and experience of Kashmir he had to be given full latitude.... I really do not see where the States Ministry comes into the picture, except that it should be kept informed of steps taken....

*All this was done at my instance and I do not propose to abdicate my functions in regard to matters for which I consider myself responsible. May I say that the manner of approach to Gopalaswami was hardly in keeping with the courtesy due to a colleague?*¹⁰⁹

To this there could only be one answer. The Sardar sent it in his own hand.

Patel to Nehru, 23.12.47: *Your letter of today has been received just now at 1 p.m. and I am writing immediately to tell you this. It has caused me considerable pain.... Your letter makes it clear to me that I must not or at least cannot continue as a Member of Government and hence I am hereby tendering my resignation. I am grateful to you for the courtesy and kindness shown to me during the period of office which was a period of considerable strain.*¹¹⁰

Later that night came Nehru's reply:

*Nehru to Patel, 23.12.47: I am sorry that what I wrote to you gave you pain. I am myself very unhappy about the trend of events and the difficulties that have arisen between you and me. It seems that our approaches are different, however much we may respect each other. If I am to continue as Prime Minister, I cannot have my freedom restricted and I must have a certain liberty of direction. Otherwise it is better for me to retire. If unfortunately either you or I have to leave the Government of India, let this be done with dignity and goodwill. On my part I would gladly resign and hand over the reins to you.*¹¹¹

This was answered at noon the next day.

*Patel to Nehru, 24.12.47: I have no desire to restrain your liberty of direction in any manner nor have I ever done so in the past... The question of your resignation or your abdicating your functions does not arise at all. I am at one with you in that the decision may be taken with dignity and goodwill and I will strain every nerve to help you in doing so but you will not, I am sure, want me to continue long as an ineffective colleague.*¹¹²

At 5.30 p.m. that day Vallabhbhai went for a meeting with Gandhi about the safety of Delhi's Muslims. Nehru, Azad and five others joined the discussion. Afterwards Patel talked alone with the Mahatma.¹¹³ There was also a Gandhi-Nehru discussion. The upshot was the Mahatma's appointment as arbitrator. Vallabhbhai and Nehru agreed to give their respective points of view to Gandhi. It seemed clear, however, that either Patel or Nehru would have to leave the Government, and Vallabhbhai felt certain it would be him.

* * *

As far as Kashmir was concerned, Jawaharlal agreed, on Mountbatten's persuasion, to refer the question to the United Nations. Negotiation and mediation had throughout been the Governor-General's prescriptions. Within days of the attack on Kashmir he had urged Nehru to join him in a visit to Lahore to talk with Jinnah and Liaquat. Patel had protested in the clearest terms: "For the Prime Minister to go crawling to Jinnah when we are the stronger side and in the right would never be forgiven by the people of India."¹¹⁴ In the event Nehru did not go, though illness was as much a reason as Vallabhbhai's opposition. Patel was as strongly against the reference to the UN and preferred "timely action" on the ground,¹¹⁵ but Kashmir was Jawaharlal's baby by now and Vallabhbhai did not insist on his

prescriptions when, at the end of December, Nehru announced that he had decided to go to the UN. Jawaharlal obtained the Mahatma's reluctant consent but not before Gandhi had altered the wording of India's complaint to the UN. A reference to an independent Kashmir as a possible alternative to accession to either India or Pakistan was removed.¹¹⁶

Patel's misgivings were amply fulfilled after India invited the UN's assistance. A series of counter-charges was Pakistan's reply to India's complaint. Junagadh and allegations of India's "genocide" against Muslims were introduced. Guided by the British delegate, the Security Council seemed to imply that Pakistan's case was stronger than India's. The question of vacating the aggression in Kashmir was turned into "the India-Pakistan dispute". In debate at the UN, Gopalaswami, for all his ability, and Abdullah, for all his dash, were out-performed by Pakistan's Zafrullah Khan. In Kashmir itself, winter put a stop to serious fighting. The raiders had been driven out of the Valley and pushed back into rough terrain but not right out of the State. The future would see conflict wane and wax in Kashmir and lines of control shift, but neither India nor Pakistan would gain it entire, and the hopes and dreams of no one, Abdullah or Hari Singh, Vallabhbhai or Nehru, Gandhi or Jinnah, would be realized.

* * *

If Nehru desired the Kashmir portfolio, Mountbatten coveted the Hyderabad one. The State's size and the Nizam's wealth contributed to Mountbatten's keenness. So did the Governor-General's royal blood. So did Mountbatten's desire to prove to Churchill and other Tory leaders that he had done his utmost to protect the "Faithful Ally", as the King of England had described the Nizam about thirty years earlier. Vallabhbhai gave Mountbatten considerable latitude in his attempts to reach a negotiated settlement with the Nizam. There was only one condition he imposed: Hyderabad would be "the affair of India and India alone".¹¹⁷ Pakistan was not to be brought into the picture. Provided he accepted this, Mountbatten was free to talk with the Nizam or his emissaries. But when Sir Walter Monckton, the brilliant English lawyer engaged by the Nizam, proposed that the Nizam sign a document of association rather than an Instrument of Accession, and Mountbatten seemed to favour the proposal, Patel flatly turned it down.

He agreed, however, to Mountbatten holding another round of talks and did not brush aside the Admiral's plea for an assurance to Hyderabad that administrative arrangements previously made by it

with central and provincial authorities in India would continue. Embodied in a Standstill Agreement, such assurances had been offered only to acceding States. "No accession, no Standstill Agreement" was India's declared policy. Yet Vallabhbhai was willing to make an exception provided the Nizam gave an undertaking that he would not accede to Pakistan. The Nizam writing a secret letter to this effect to Mountbatten, a Standstill Agreement was signed on November 29. Among other things it provided for each party posting an Agent-General at the other's headquarters. To represent India in Hyderabad, Patel chose a man whose views tended to coincide with his, K. M. Munshi. After appointing Munshi and securing the Nizam's commitment not to join Pakistan, Vallabhbhai was content to wait. Aware that the Nizam was lending his ear to extremist Muslims, Patel felt nonetheless that time was not on the Nizam's side. There was no pressing need to retrieve the Hyderabad portfolio from Mountbatten, who would in any case leave in the summer of 1948. Until events disillusioned him, Jinnah had believed that Kashmir would fall into his lap like a ripe fruit.¹¹⁸ Vallabhbhai had a similar feeling about Hyderabad.

* * *

An India-wide process of integration was triggered in December 1947 by the merger into Orissa and the C.P. of forty states. Preceding events do not prepare us for the speed and resolve that the Sardar displayed in obtaining the merger. It is likely that the restrictions on his role in Kashmir and Hyderabad goaded him to act elsewhere. In any case, Patel claimed in January 1948 that postponement of the merger would have been a serious risk and that it would have been foolish to "let slip an opportunity".¹¹⁹

It had been the small State of Nilgiri (pop. 73,109, area 284 square miles) that first revealed the opportunity for merger as well as the risks in postponing it. This "princely" fragment of territory embedded in Orissa lacked size, money and competent men. Its ruler was locked in a struggle with a Prajamandal that was pressing for popular rule. Its adivasis were in strife with non-adivasis. Communists seemed to be involved; Vallabhbhai's anxiety on this score was enhanced by his knowledge that in the State of Hyderabad, Communists had links with the Razakars, a militant Muslim group opposed to Hyderabad's accession to India. Nilgiri's "administration" collapsing, the Centre asked the provincial government of Orissa, in November, to run the State. The takeover was swift and smooth; the Raja of Nilgiri admitted in a proclamation that he had been unable to look after his State; and Patel, who thought that some of Nilgiri's sister States were likely to experience a similar unrest and breakdown, had

an instant vision of all the Orissa and Chhattisgarh States, as they were called, merging with Orissa or C.P.

There were 27 Orissa States and 14 Chhattisgarh ones, making 41 States in all. Some were even smaller than Nilgiri, but others were larger, Chhattisgarh's Bastar (pop. over half a million; area approx. 13,000 square miles) and Orissa's Mayurbhanj (pop. about one million; area approx. 4,000) being the largest. Many of these States possessed mineral and forest wealth and all a substantial adivasi element. Prajamandals were active in several of them. None seemed to have administrators and all were dependent for survival on Orissa or C.P. or Bihar. Before independence, these States had been governed, in effect, by officers of the Raj's Political Department; and in 1940 the Secretary of State for India, Lord Zetland, had envisaged the Orissa States ultimately becoming part of Orissa province.¹²⁰ Fearing such an eventuality and seeking warmth from one another, the rulers of many of these States had come together, some days before independence, in an unrecognized Eastern States Union. Bastar and Mayurbhanj had however stayed out of this fairly artificial Union which possessed neither a continuous territory nor a common language.

Merger with Orissa or C.P. was not necessarily the only solution for these States. Recognizing and widening the Eastern States Union was another. Alternatively, the States and the province or provinces surrounding them could be asked to co-ordinate their affairs. In the third week of November, Vallabhbhai discussed the three options with Menon and Mahtab, the Premier of Orissa, one of the Ahmednagar twelve and a leader from the late thirties of the confederation of the Orissa States' Prajamandals. The Eastern States Union found no support in this discussion. It lacked the men to govern a large and complex area, and Patel saw a gulf between rulers and their subjects. The co-ordination idea was less readily dismissed. There would be friction, true, between rival authorities, but was merger moral? In July Vallabhbhai had assured the States that the Government of India "would scrupulously respect their autonomous existence" in all matters other than defence, external affairs and communications. Could he now, in November and December, contemplate the extinction of some forty of them? Though admitting that merger meant "setting aside" a "guarantee", Patel said that he felt "quite sure" that the rulers of these States lacked "the capacity to secure the wellbeing of their subjects". Moreover, merger seemed the only way of "saving the rulers from the fury of their subjects". Co-ordination might be tried for the bigger States.¹²¹

Since merging rulers would surrender their States for all time, it was, as Menon put it, only "elementary justice that some form of quid pro quo should be conceded to them". Recalling that the Raj had given

liberal pensions to rulers whose territory it took over, the Sardar and Menon concluded that merging rulers should receive privy purses for their maintenance and that these allowances "should not be terminated with the present rulers but should be continued to their successors"¹²² Vallabhbhai felt, too, that the privy purses should be tax-free (the rulers were immune from taxes in their own territories); private properties, including palaces, should stay with the rulers; succession to the gaddi should be assured; and the personal privileges of the ruler, his wife, his mother, the heir-apparent and the latter's wife should be guaranteed. He decided, finally, that the Centre rather than a province should take over a State, though the Centre would thereafter ask the province to run it.

On November 21 Patel asked Menon to fix two meetings in the middle of December, one in Cuttack with rulers of the smaller Orissa States, and another in Nagpur with rulers of the smaller Chhattisgarh States. He had not intended to take part in these meetings: Menon and the provincial Premiers were to do the needful. However, a few days before Menon was to leave for Cuttack, Vallabhbhai announced that he would go too. Behind the decision lay Patel's feeling that the bigger States too might have to merge. The co-ordination plan was not standing up to scrutiny. A half-way house between the status quo and merger would be far too cumbrous. But it was not until Vallabhbhai and Menon had arrived in Cuttack and conferred with Mahtab and his colleagues in the Orissa Cabinet and with Chandulal Trivedi, the Governor, that it was decided to ask the bigger States too to merge. According to Mahtab, Patel spent the evening and night of December 13 "examining [the Premier's] grip over the administration" and his capacity to cope if the rulers proved recalcitrant. Evidently Vallabhbhai also probed "the capacity of the people to agitate" if the rulers rejected his advice to merge. "If necessary," Mahtab told the Sardar, "all the States will be taken over the day you leave."¹²³

Next morning Vallabhbhai went into battle. The rulers of the smaller Orissa States met him at 10 a.m. Patel told them "in a most persuasive speech" that their safety as well as the safety of their subjects was in danger. He had come only to tender friendly advice. They, the rulers, were in no position either to suppress the cry for responsible Government or to provide it. Why should they continue to expose themselves as targets in troublous times? If they divested themselves of all power and authority, the Government of India would guarantee their privileges, honour and dignity. But if his advice was not listened to, and the rulers, after being ousted by the people, came to Delhi for his help, he might be unable to offer it. The young Raja of Ranpur enquired whether he would be allowed to stand for election to the Orissa Assembly. Vallabhbhai replied at once in the affirmative. "Instead of diving in a narrow well," he said,

“the ruler would be entitled to swim in an ocean.” When some rulers asked for an increase in the size of the privy purse – Menon had explained how the amounts would be fixed –, Patel “was firm”. He said that “if the privy purses were to be settled in perpetuity”, they should “not be so high as to become a target for attack”. That evening 12 rulers signed their States away.¹²⁴

By this time Vallabhbhai had had a discussion with the rulers of the bigger Orissa States. The Maharaja of Mayurbhanj, the largest, was told that in view of the size, population and revenue of his State he could stay out. The others, led by the Maharaja of Patna, fought hard for coordination with Orissa rather than merger. When the Maharaja of Patna asked for time for further consideration of merger, Patel “almost lost his patience and said that if the friendly advice which he tendered was not acceptable, he could not answer for the consequences”.¹²⁵ Menon then suggested that the rulers consider the proposal for a few hours and, after that, meet him at ten in the night.

“Sardar was very much disappointed” with the rulers’ attitude but the latter had every reason to feel surprised. Vallabhbhai had only spoken of the smaller States merging when, on December 1, the Maharaja of Patna had called on the Sardar in Delhi. Now, on Dec. 15, he and seven other rulers talked with Menon from 10 p.m. until midnight. Patel and Menon were to proceed to Nagpur the next day for talks with the Chhattisgarh rulers. Would they take news of failure with them? Or of a forcible takeover? Menon’s resourcefulness, admirable but also questionable, ensured that they took word of success. After midnight he contacted the Raja of Dhenkanal, one of the bigger Orissa States. This Raja was in difficulty with the Prajamandal in his State and had sought the Government of India’s favours. Menon told him that “all his reasonable demands would be conceded” if he agreed to merge his State with Orissa. The Raja “readily agreed”. He agreed again when Menon requested him to tell the other rulers at once of his decision and to pass on another message: if the rulers did not sign, Menon would issue orders then and there confining the rulers to Cuttack, and the States Ministry would occupy their States as soon as sufficient policemen could be assembled.¹²⁶

The Dhenkanal ruler went post haste to the Maharaja of Patna, who knocked on Menon’s door “in the very early hours of the morning of December 15”. To him Menon repeated the threats of confinement and a takeover. When the Maharaja asked why the extreme step was being considered, Menon, who knew that Patna State was free from trouble, could only reply that agitation was bound to hit Patna before long. The ruler asked if Menon was prepared to convey the threat in writing. Menon said yes, whereupon the Maharaja brought in the other rulers. A clause by clause consideration of the agreement then began.

Menon made some minor alterations in the rulers' favour. They all signed, but the rulers of Patna, Kalahandi and Baudh asked for and obtained the letter that Menon had agreed to provide. It said:

*The Government of India are most anxious to maintain law and order. We cannot allow your State to create problems for the Government of Orissa and if you had not signed the agreement, we would have been compelled to take over the administration of your State.*¹²⁷

Menon had been with the rulers all night on December 14 and until nine on the morning of December 15. Later he would recall:

*Sardar was very pleased when I handed him the merger agreement signed by the rulers of the 'A' class States.... I told the Sardar about the letter I had given to some of the rulers which I felt might occasion some criticism, but Sardar assured me that there was no need to worry.*¹²⁸

We may never know whether or not Menon obtained Vallabhbhai's consent before issuing his threats. What is established is that Patel had received Mahtab's assurance that the States could be taken over on the day of his departure, and also that Vallabhbhai defended Menon. Even if unauthorized, Menon's ingenuity served Patel's plan and was not disowned by him. Praise or blame for it goes to both. The Maharaja of Kalahandi charged afterwards that he had been coerced, and there were less truthful stories of rulers being locked in a room in Cuttack. Menon's letter to the three rulers found its way into print, and Vallabhbhai sent Menon with his version of the Cuttack events to Gandhi and Nehru. Jawaharlal merely listened, but the Mahatma, so claims Menon, told the latter that he approved of the merger. Neither Nehru nor the Cabinet had been consulted before merger was decided upon and executed – as far as the bigger States were concerned, the two steps were almost simultaneous. In Patel's own words, the Cabinet merely recorded "subsequent confirmation of my action practically without discussion".¹²⁹ Jawaharlal could not criticize merger without damaging his own anti-feudal image, but he raised procedural objections, complaining to the Mahatma that

*many decisions have been taken by the States Ministry without any reference to the Cabinet. For my part I agree with those decisions; but it seems to me a wrong procedure for these decisions to be taken without reference to the Cabinet or the PM.*¹³⁰

On this Vallabhbhai's comment was that he had only "anticipated a Cabinet decision". "Postponement of the decisive act," he added, "would have been fraught with serious consequences and would have let slip an opportunity which would have perhaps recurred only after considerable patience, toil and trouble to all concerned."¹³¹

After the Cuttack capitulation, there was no chance of the Chhattisgarh States holding out. Patel met 14 rulers or representatives of these States in Nagpur in the afternoon of December 15. Big and small, all signed. The ruler of Korea had asked whether the privy purse would be included in the Constitution and whether a new Government of India would be able to renege on it. "Sardar assured him," records Menon, "that the agreement which the rulers were signing embodied a guarantee given by the Government of India and that the intention was to incorporate it in the new Constitution."¹³² The intention was implemented: the guarantee was written into the Constitution. But the ingenuity of a later decade altered the Constitution and swallowed the privy purse.

The swift accomplishment of his vision for the Orissa and Chhattisgarh States encouraged Vallabhbhai to envisage a united area composed of Kathiawad's 222 States. Many of these States owning discrete bits of territory, the map of Kathiawad was divided into about 860 jurisdictions. It was obvious that a United State of Kathiawad would not suffer from the weakness of the unrecognized and short-lived Eastern States Union. It would have one language, Gujarati, and a clear, continuous territory: no non-princely fragment was embedded in Kathiawad. Also, the revenues of the Kathiawad States were much larger than those of the Orissa or Chhattisgarh States.

Moreover, some of the Kathiawad States were well-run and moving towards democracy, and the Maharaja of Bhavnagar, one of the 14 major or "salute" States of the region and possessing the highest revenue, was about to install a popular government. He had gone for guidance to Gandhi, who directed the Maharaja to Patel. Patel and the Maharaja agreed that Balwantray Mehta, the leader of the State's Prajamandal, should be Bhavnagar's first Premier. Going further, the Maharaja declared himself ready to dissolve his State in a United State of Kathiawad and to accept any privy purse that the Mahatma might fix. If union seemed feasible, the continuance of 222 or even 14 separate jurisdictions was wasteful and a guarantee of future conflicts. By the end of December 1947, Vallabhbhai was resolved on a twin goal for the Kathiawad States: union plus democracy. To get closer to it, he accepted an invitation from the Bhavnagar Maharaja to launch the new Government in his State on January 15, and directed Menon to discuss, immediately after that date, a union with Kathiawad's rulers.

Patel's tactics for Kathiawad differed in two respects from the Orissa and Chhattisgarh States' exercise. Firstly, he obtained the Mahatma's prior blessing for his plan of unification. Secondly, he kept himself in reserve and did not join the negotiations. After the Bhavnagar ceremony, he flew for a few hours to Rajkot and made "a powerful and virile speech". He did not talk directly of the union that Menon was to discuss in that town with the rulers, but referred to "little pools of water" that become "stagnant and useless" and added that if the pools "joined together to form a big lake", everybody would benefit.¹³³ The huge crowd hearing him knew exactly what he meant. So did the rulers who by now had arrived in Rajkot to greet the Sardar and talk with Menon. Vallabhbhai wished Menon good luck and left for Bombay.

The nuts that Menon hoped to crack in Rajkot were wholly different from Cuttack's. Wealth, pride in lineage, fame as sportsmen, links with the world, diplomatic skill, a tradition of pomp and dignity and in some cases of benevolence – these were among the attributes that Menon faced during five days of intensive negotiation in Rajkot. Intimidation was unlikely to succeed here. "Sophisticated and confident princes had to be persuaded by argument and the logic of events."¹³⁴

The logic of events was too plain to be missed by intelligent men. Even so Menon spelt it out. Democratic rule was irresistible. Elected assemblies in the Kathiawad States were bound to ask for merger with Bombay or for a united Kathiawad. The Government of India would not be able to turn down such a demand. However, the rulers could get good terms if they rather than elected assemblies dealt with the Government of India. Said Menon:

His Highness the Maharaja of Bhavnagar has already declared himself in favour of a United Kathiawar State. I may also remind you of the metaphor employed by Sardar Patel, of how a large lake cools the whole atmosphere while small pools become stagnant....

*It is not possible for 222 States to continue their separate existence for very much longer. The extinction of the separate existence of the States may not be palatable, but unless something is done in good time to stabilise the situation in Kathiawar, the march of events may bring about still more unpalatable results.*¹³⁵

The young Maharaja of Dhrangadhra was the first to join Bhavnagar in support of a union. Persuading the Jamsaheb of Nawanagar was harder but once he accepted Menon's task was virtually over. On January 22 Kathiawad's major rulers signed a covenant for union. Later Menon would recall

the poignant spectacle of the rulers parting with their proud heritage. No ruler had thought even a month previously that he would have so soon to part with his State and rulership. Something which had been in their families for generations and which they had regarded as sacrosanct had disappeared as it were in the twinkling of an eye.

Though all of them put up a bold front, the mental anguish they were going through was writ large on their faces....The old Maharaja of Morvi came to me and asked whether the Government of India would allow him to abdicate and permit his son, who would succeed him, to sign the Covenant.... Morvi State was well-governed and the Maharaja left the largest cash balance in relation to the size of the State.¹³⁶

On February 15 the Sardar inaugurated the United States of Kathiawad at Jamnagar. The Jamsaheb was sworn in as Rajpramukh, a constitutional head. His measured words at the ceremony merit a look:

It is not as if we were tired monarchs who were fanned to rest. It is not as if we have been bullied into submission. We have by our own free volition pooled our sovereignties... so that the United States of Kathiawar and the unity of India may be more fully achieved and so that our people may have that form of government which is today most acceptable to them and which I hope and pray will prove beneficial to them.¹³⁷

Soon an elected Assembly was in place, charged with devising a constitution for the new Union and also serving as its legislature. Dhebar, Vallabhbhai's colleague from the thirties, was elected Premier. While some princes spent the interval between agreeing to join a Union and actually joining it "in rewarding their relations, friends and officers as well as in helping themselves", the Maharaja of Porbandar "handed over his State with everything intact", even surrendering the silver vessels in his palace.¹³⁸

By the middle of February 1948 – no more than six months after independence – Patel and Menon had presented two accomplished schemes, one where States merged into provinces and the other where they joined one another in a Union. The two distinct schemes, one executed in the east and the other in the west, set a pattern and created a momentum. Before the end of February the Deccan States were merged with Bombay and two States with Madras. In March the Gujarat States agreed to merge into Bombay and three small States into East Punjab. Other unions and mergers took place in March, April and May of 1948. Himachal Pradesh, Rajasthan, Madhya Bharat,

Vindhya Pradesh, Matsya, and PEPSU (Patiala and the Eastern Punjab States Union) came into being. The map of India was refashioned. Some of the new constructions survived at least into the late eighties. Others merged with larger neighbours. In due course we will look at the stories of a few. But we have already glimpsed the birth and beginning of a unified India.

* * *

It was a Vallabhbhai expecting to leave the Government who had planned, in 1947's final week and the opening two weeks of 1948, the unification of Kathiawad. On his side he had resigned. Only the Mahatma's approval was awaited and Patel fully expected it. He felt certain that Jawaharlal and Azad wanted him to leave and that the Mahatma's ears were being poisoned against him. He thought he had smelt this at the December 24 meeting with Gandhi, Nehru, Azad and five other Muslims.¹³⁹ The Mahatma, on his part, seemed finally to concede that Vallabhbhai should leave, if only to facilitate a change in Delhi's administration. Nehru, Azad and the other Muslims attending the December 24 meeting had wanted Randhawa to be transferred, and Patel had replied, "Why don't you take charge? I can't work like this."¹⁴⁰ A significant proportion of Delhi's police were Hindu or Sikh Punjabis, including a number of refugees, several of whom had lost near and dear ones in Pakistan. They found it hard to sympathize with Muslims, and the Sardar did not press them to do so. He "could not afford to lose their loyalty by putting too heavy a strain on it."¹⁴¹

Gandhi understood this but found it difficult to tell Delhi's Muslims that there was a limit to the sympathy they should expect. Vallabhbhai's departure seemed to him a possible if hazardous way out. At the end of December or early in January – most probably on December 29 or 30¹⁴² –, Gandhi said to Patel: "Either you should run things or Jawaharlal should." Vallabhbhai replied: "I do not have the physical strength. He is younger. Let him run the show. I will assist him to the extent possible from outside." The Mahatma reserved judgment.¹⁴³

Patel enjoyed exercising power, thought himself good at it and thought too that Nehru, the Cabinet and in fact India needed him. The idea of leaving did not fill him with joy. But there was no question of his accepting Azad's interference in the running of Delhi, which was the Home Ministry's function, or Nehru's interpretation of a Premier's role. He would rather go.

Gopalaswami's takeover of the Kashmir desk was not the only assault, as Vallabhbhai saw it, on his self-respect or sense of propriety. In the third week of December, following rioting in the Centrally-run

territory of Ajmer, Jawaharlal had sent H. V. R. Iengar, his Principal Private Secretary, to Ajmer. Nehru had planned to go himself but the death of a nephew detained him. Neither Patel nor any Home Ministry official was informed or consulted about Iengar's trip but Iengar telephoned Ajmer's Chief Commissioner, Shanker Prasad, to say that he was coming "to look into events".

Once in Ajmer, Iengar met some members of the Advisory Council, inspected the damage and received various deputations. Shanker Prasad complained to Vallabhbhai of an "inquisition" but Patel himself reacted in even stronger terms. He had issued a detailed statement on the Ajmer riots the day before Iengar arrived in Ajmer and felt that Iengar's visit would be seen as a Nehru-sponsored check on the performance of the Ajmer authorities and on the facts that Vallabhbhai had supplied.¹⁴⁴ "My junior was being sent to inquire into my action" – this was the thought that came to Patel.¹⁴⁵ Since the Home Ministry was responsible for the services, Vallabhbhai tended to regard every official as *his* junior.

An inquiry into Patel's role or that of Shanker Prasad was not Nehru's purpose. Unable to go himself to Ajmer, he had sent his Secretary "to convey the PM's regrets and as the eyes and ears of the PM". Yet intentions do not govern effects. Suspicions do. Many in Ajmer thought that Iengar was examining Prasad's work; and to some in Delhi Iengar's visit to Ajmer was evidence that Nehru did not trust the Sardar. One word from Nehru to Vallabhbhai that he was thinking of sending Iengar would have made all the difference, yet, as we saw in the Gopalaswami affair, teamwork is precisely what was lacking in December 1947. And when Patel expressed to Nehru his "shock" that Iengar had been sent to Ajmer, he did so in a letter, not over the phone or face to face, additional evidence of crippled teamwork. "Am I not to send," Nehru wrote in reply, "a personal representative to any place? That would make me a prisoner." To this Vallabhbhai gave a good answer: "The question is not whether the Prime Minister was entitled to take this step or not, but whether I, as a Minister, was wrong in pointing out to him the inadvisability of the course he had taken."

Most of the points and counter-points were made in letters that Patel and Jawaharlal wrote to each other or in the notes they separately gave to the Mahatma. Both Vallabhbhai and Jawaharlal had thus turned again to Gandhi, but as an umpire rather than a guru. Nehru's note to the Mahatma was dated January 6, Vallabhbhai's January 12. The letters and the notes covered the Gopalaswami and Ajmer episodes and discussed the extent of a Premier's pre-eminence. Nehru said that if the Prime Minister's function, as he saw it, was not appreciated, "then the only alternative left is for either me or Sardar Patel to leave the Cabinet". He added: "If someone has

to leave, I would prefer to leave.' The Sardar's response showed that if suspicion and touchiness marked the Patel-Nehru relationship, so did nobility.

If anybody has to go, it should be myself. I have long passed the age of active service. The Prime Minister is the acknowledged leader of the country and is comparatively young. I have no doubt that the choice between him and myself should be resolved in his favour. There is, therefore, no question of his quitting office.

The ball was now with the Mahatma, who would reflect on the notes, talk with India's duumvirs and name the one to go. Vallabhbhai was sure that it would be him. But the tired and harassed old warrior had decided to go on a great note. He would fulfil a long-nursed hope of Gandhi's before leaving. He would unify Kathiawad. It would be his parting gift to one who had always preferred, and was likely once more to prefer, "the glamorous Jawahar". On January 12 he sent Nehru a copy of his note to Gandhi and said in the covering letter: "You can fix up with Bapu for a discussion any time that suits you. I shall be leaving for Bhavnagar and Bombay on the morning of 15 January."¹⁴⁶

It was on December 23 that he had written his letter of resignation to Jawaharlal. Since then he had toured extensively and addressed several meetings, as if farewelling friends and places and the people of India. On December 28 he flew in the Jamsaheb's plane to Jammu, along with the Jamsaheb, and spent three hours with the Maharaja and the Maharani, causing Jawaharlal to complain to Gandhi that he did not know that Patel was going to Jammu or taking the Jamsaheb with him.¹⁴⁷ Returning to Delhi, Vallabhbhai told a huge gathering in Mehrauli that not an inch of Kashmir would be yielded but he said also that "recent massacres in Delhi and elsewhere had disgraced the people".¹⁴⁸ On January 2 he told a Shillong audience that he was glad that the people of Assam had forgotten and forgiven the work for Pakistan of the province's Muslims, but this also meant that Muslims had to stand by India if there was war with Pakistan.¹⁴⁹ In Shillong, Patel saw something of Premier Bardoloi and of Akbar Hydari, the Governor of Assam, who had come close to him in recent months.

At his next halt, Calcutta, Vallabhbhai was glad to spend some time with C.R., West Bengal's Governor, and speak to another large crowd. His expectation of departure showed in one of his remarks: "We old men have fulfilled our life's mission."¹⁵⁰ He made two other noteworthy points. One was on the Left/Right debate, which was hotter in Calcutta than elsewhere:

I have been accused of being a friend of Rajas, capitalists and zamindars. But I claim to be a friend of Labour and the poor. Since I followed Gandhiji, I resolved not to own property and have none.... But I cannot succumb to the prevalent fashion to pose as a leader or to attempt to gain leadership by abusing princes and capitalists.¹⁵¹

The other was on Pakistan's share of the assets of undivided India. The two countries had agreed in November that Rs 55 crores remained to be transferred to Pakistan. Within two hours of the agreement, India informed Pakistan – on Patel's insistence – that implementation would hinge on a settlement on Kashmir. Silence was Pakistan's response to this caveat: it could not accept that the cash was connected with Kashmir but argument would only harden the Indian position. In his Calcutta speech Vallabhbhai did not refer to the 55-crore figure or, directly, to Kashmir, yet his meaning was clear:

In the division of assets we treated Pakistan generously. But obviously we cannot tolerate even a pie being spent for making bullets to be shot at us. The settlement (on assets) is like a consent decree. The decree will be executed when all the outstanding points are satisfactorily settled.¹⁵²

Lucknow, where he spoke next, had nourished several advocates of Pakistan. It also contained undecided Muslims and militant Hindus. Patel was sarcastic with the first group, blunt with the second and frank with the third:

The Muslim Leaguers used to call Mahatma Gandhi as their enemy number one. Now they think of Gandhiji as their friend and have substituted me in his place, for I speak the truth. They believed that if they had Pakistan they would ensure full protection to Muslims. But have they ever sympathized with Muslims living in India?

To Indian Muslims I have only one question. Why did you not open your mouths on the Kashmir issue? Why did you not condemn the action of Pakistan?... It is your duty now to sail in the same boat and sink or swim together. I want to tell you very frankly that you cannot ride two horses. Select one horse. Those who want to go to Pakistan can go there and live in peace.

I appeal to the Hindu Mahasabhaites to join the Congress.... If you think that you are the only custodians of Hinduism, you are mistaken. Hinduism preaches a broader outlook. I appeal to the RSS not to be rash and tactless. Do not be aggressive.¹⁵³

Following the Sardar's return on January 7 to Delhi, the Cabinet discussed Pakistan's approaches for the 55 crores. Vallabhbhai "forcefully put forward his point of view". He had "authentic information that financially Pakistan was in bad shape" and said that "there was no doubt that the payment would be converted into sinews of war against India".¹⁵⁴ He was clear that "not a pie" could be given.¹⁵⁵ Mookerjee, Gadgil and Ambedkar backed him¹⁵⁶ and Nehru too was "in full agreement". The Cabinet decided to withhold the money, and on the morning of January 12 Patel told a Press Conference that "the settlement of financial issues cannot be isolated from that of other vital issues and has to be implemented simultaneously."¹⁵⁸

From his Press Conference Vallabhbhai went to Birla House. It was Gandhi's day of silence. The previous day a nationalist Maulana of Delhi had said to the Mahatma: "Men like myself cannot go to Pakistan: we have been opposed to its formation. On the other hand, Hindus will not allow us to live in the capital. Why not arrange a passage for us and send us to England?"¹⁵⁹ Gandhi heard this remark after several days of brooding over his helplessness. He was impatient to go to Sind and West Punjab and succour the Hindus and Sikhs there but the insecurity of Delhi's Muslims had robbed him of the credentials to visit Pakistan. Though killings had largely stopped in the capital, Muslims were still being pushed out of their homes and getting little relief from the police. The steely barb of the nationalist Maulana pierced Gandhi's heart and evoked a decision to fast until the situation improved. A fast had been in his mind from about the first of January. The barb removed every doubt. Observing silence, Gandhi did not communicate his intention to Patel when the latter called at noon on January 12. In fact Gandhi had not yet told anyone about it. He would only announce it in his prayer speech that evening.

At 7.15 p.m. Sushila Nayar, the Mahatma's physician and aide, came running to 1 Aurangzeb Road to inform the Sardar that Gandhi had announced an indefinite fast to start the following morning. Vallabhbhai was "very much upset" but asked to be told if there was anything he could do.¹⁶⁰ Next morning he went to Birla House, where the Mahatma conveyed the view that not to give the 55 crores to Pakistan seemed immoral. "Who says so?" asked Patel. "Mountbatten," replied Gandhi. The previous evening, after announcing his decision to fast, the Mahatma had gone to meet Mountbatten and asked him what he thought of the decision to withhold the 55 crores. Mountbatten gave Gandhi his opinion that withholding the money would be "unstatesmanlike and unwise" and India's "first dishonourable act".¹⁶¹

Patel went straight to Mountbatten and tackled him: "How can you as a constitutional Governor-General do this behind my back? Do you

know the facts? People are now bound to link the fast with the 55 crores." Vallabhbhai reminded Mountbatten that "clear notice had been given to Pakistan, within two hours of the agreement on assets, that India intended to link implementation with a settlement on Kashmir." Mountbatten said he would withdraw the word "dishonourable" but not his other adjectives. He also sent his revised opinion to Gandhi.¹⁶² From Mountbatten Patel returned to Gandhi and asked him if he had talked to Jawaharlal about the 55 crores. "It was a Cabinet decision, you know," Vallabhbhai added. The Mahatma replied that he had just talked with Nehru, who had commented: "Yes, it was passed but we don't have a case. It is legal quibbling."¹⁶³

On the morning of the 14th, Patel, Nehru, Shanmukham Chetty, the Finance Minister, and Matthai discussed the 55 crores with Gandhi. Tears ran down the Mahatma's face. The Sardar, as he would later admit, uttered "extremely bitter words".¹⁶⁴ Later that afternoon, however, the Cabinet decided that the 55 crores would be released. At this meeting Vallabhbhai broke down and wept. "We unanimously agreed," he said, "and [now] the PM calls it legal quibbling. This is my last meeting."¹⁶⁵ But he supported the decision to release the money. He was to leave early next morning for Bhavnagar and Rajkot for the bid for a united Kathiawad – his gift for the Mahatma – that we have already viewed. He did not feel he should postpone the Kathiawad appointments and Gandhi also "insisted on his keeping them".¹⁶⁶ Before leaving he penned his misery to Gandhi:

I have to leave for Kathiawad at seven this morning. It is agonising beyond endurance to have to go away.... The sight of your anguish yesterday has made me disconsolate. It has set me furiously thinking. The burden of work has become so heavy that I feel crushed under it.

Jawaharlal is even more burdened than I. His heart is heavy with grief. Maybe I have deteriorated with age and am no good any more as a comrade to stand by him and lighten his burden. The Maulana too is displeased with what I am doing and you have again and again to take up cudgels on my behalf. This also is intolerable to me.

It will perhaps be good for me and the country if you now let me go. I can only act in my way. And if thereby I become burdensome to my lifelong colleagues and a source of distress to you, and still I stick to office, it would mean that I allowed the lust for power to blind my eyes....

*I earnestly beseech you to give up your fast and get this question settled soon. It may even help remove the causes that have prompted your fast.*¹⁶⁷

Patel did not know while writing the letter that Gandhi by now was convinced that neither Vallabhbhai nor Nehru should leave the Government. Reflection following his decision to fast had clarified this question in the Mahatma's mind. Also, and this too Patel did not know as yet, Mountbatten had argued strongly for Vallabhbhai's retention in his talk with Gandhi on the evening of January 12.¹⁶⁸

Wounded by Mountbatten's backbiting and Jawaharlal's disloyalty and bitter at Gandhi's stand on the 55 crores, Patel felt too that the timing of Gandhi's fast "was hopelessly wrong".¹⁶⁹ Each of these reactions was deep, yet it has to be recorded that Vallabhbhai put them all aside and remembered only two things: Gandhi's suffering and his own duty over Kathiawad. Before leaving for Kathiawad he gave a statement to the Press:

*The only thing that can relieve Gandhiji of his mental and physical agony is for us all to do all that is possible to create an atmosphere of peace and remove distrust and bitterness.... Let it not be said that we did not deserve the leadership of the greatest man of the world.*¹⁷⁰

We noted what Patel did and said in Bhavnagar and Rajkot on January 15 when we looked at the birth of the Kathiawad Union. From January 16 he was in Bombay, staying at Birla House. There was a stream of callers and a sequence of meetings, but morning and evening he phoned Delhi to find out how Gandhi was, and Rajkot to find out how Menon was faring with the princes. His feelings mellowed with each passing hour, not only towards the Mahatma but also towards Nehru. "Jawaharlal has aged in the last months by ten years," he said on January 16.¹⁷¹ "Why should we cavil at the payment of 55 crores if it meant some relief to Gandhiji's mental agony?" he remarked the same day, adding, "We take a short-range view while he takes a long-range one."¹⁷²

On January 17 Vallabhbhai expressed the opinion that "talk of retaliatory action against Muslims" had been responsible for the fast.¹⁷³ Mountbatten, the first person to whom Gandhi spoke after announcing his fast, thought that it "doubtless had the object of bringing Pandit Nehru and Sardar Patel together again".¹⁷⁴ Though the Mahatma had asked for the release of the 55 crores to Pakistan, the decision to withhold it was not the reason for his fast; had it been the reason, Gandhi would have broken his fast on the afternoon of January 14, when the Cabinet revoked the decision. Before leaving Delhi, Patel had wondered, as the last sentence in his letter to the Mahatma shows, whether the fast was not directed at him. Some others shared the suspicion and confronted Gandhi with it. He replied on January 15:

The suggested interpretation never crossed my mind. Many Muslim friends had complained to me of the Sardar's so-called anti-Muslim attitude. I had, with a degree of suppressed pain, listened to them without giving any explanation. The fast freed me from this self-imposed restraint, and I was able to assure the critics that they were wrong in isolating him from Pandit Nehru and me, whom they gratuitously raise to the sky.

The Sardar had a bluntness of speech which sometimes unintentionally hurt, though his heart was expansive enough to accommodate all. I wonder if with a knowledge of this background anybody would dare call my fast a condemnation of the policy of the Home Ministry. If there is any such person, I can only tell him that he would degrade and hurt himself, never the Sardar or me.¹⁷⁵

Gandhi's defence produced mixed emotions in Vallabhbhai. It served to dispel the suspicion that the fast was aimed at him. However, Patel could not resist the feeling that, irrespective of its origin, the fast was clipping his wings and strengthening Nehru's. On the other hand, here was the Mahatma coming once more to his aid. A part of him recognized this, yet another part, where the proud Sardar resided, could not relish the notion of another person protecting him. It was at a public meeting that Vallabhbhai's heart, where bitterness and hurt pride jostled with concern for India and for Gandhi, was bared. Replying to a civic address from the Bombay Corporation, he said on January 16:

You have only mentioned about my having gone to jail several times. I was only one of thousands who did so.... To tell you frankly, if as a result of what I have been doing at the Centre I get imprisonment, I would welcome it, because from experience I have found imprisonment to be much sweeter.

If in spite of having achieved independence Gandhiji has to fast today in order to achieve real Hindu-Muslim unity, it is a standing shame for us.

We have just heard people shouting that Muslims should be removed from India. Those who do so have gone mad with anger. I am a frank man. I say bitter things to Hindus and Muslims alike. At the same time I maintain that I am a friend of Muslims.

Some of them went to Gandhiji and complained over my Lucknow speech.... Gandhiji felt compelled to defend me. That also pained me. For, after all, I am not a weak person who would like to be defended by others.¹⁷⁶

Gandhi was weak, ill and delirious on the evening of January 17. But Rajendra Prasad and Azad had spent the 24 preceding hours collecting

pledges from Delhi's citizens. Representatives of Sikh and Hindu refugees, the Hindu Mahasabha and the RSS joined others in assuring the Mahatma that mosques occupied by non-Muslims would be vacated, areas set apart for Muslims would not be forcibly occupied and Muslims choosing to return to Delhi could do so and move about as before. Muslims of the old city urged Gandhi to yield. Azad, Prasad and the Pakistan High Commissioner did likewise. At 12.45 p.m. Gandhi accepted a glass of orange juice from Azad and broke his fast. The eyes of Nehru, who was present but silent, were wet; he had been fasting himself since the previous day. From Bombay, Patel sent a telegram thanking God.

Not all hearts were converted, however. On January 20 there was an attempt on Gandhi's life during his prayer meeting. Several were involved but the plan miscarried. Though a bomb was thrown and a wall damaged, neither Gandhi nor anyone else was hurt. The man who hurled the grenade, Madanlal, was caught but the others ran away. On the morning of the 21st, Vallabhbhai flew from Bombay to Ahmedabad, where his friend Dr Kanuga was ill. On the 23rd Patel was back in Delhi. By this time he knew, from facts supplied by Madanlal and other information collected by the police in Delhi and Bombay, that a conspiracy to kill the Mahatma existed and that all the conspirators barring Madanlal were at large. He instructed an increase in the police force at Birla House. Apart from 19 uniformed policemen placed at different points, seven plain-clothed policemen, all armed with revolvers, were ordered to mingle with the crowd at Gandhi's prayer meeting.

Annoyed to find security men "in every nook and corner of my house" and recalling Gandhi's opposition to the excessive protection given to some of the Raj's Viceroys, Ghanshyamdas Birla complained to Vallabhbhai. Retorted the Sardar:

*Why are you worried? This is not your business. The responsibility is mine. Left to myself I should like to search every man entering Birla House, but Bapu will not let me.*¹⁷⁷

Calling on the Mahatma on the afternoon of January 23, Patel asked for permission to search everyone coming to meet Gandhi or to join his prayer meeting. The Mahatma refused to give it.¹⁷⁸ And he told Vallabhbhai that he no longer thought that one of the duumvirate should leave. Mountbatten, Gandhi said, had been emphatic on this score, and he himself now felt the same. The remark lightened Patel's heart but he said that it was essential to talk things over: much had happened that needed airing. Since Vallabhbhai was leaving for Agra and Patna on the 25th and not returning until the 27th, the two agreed to meet for an hour before Gandhi's prayer meeting on January 30.¹⁷⁹

On the 25th, before leaving for Agra, the Sardar unburdened himself to Ghanshyamdas. He recalled Gandhi's tears, confessed the sharp words that escaped his own lips and spoke of his breakdown at the Cabinet meeting. Seated nearby, Manibehn learnt of the incidents for the first time. At Agra, Patel saw the Taj again, experienced its spell afresh and relieved Pant, the U.P. Premier, by telling him that he was not leaving the Government. In Patna he rebuked Congressmen who talked of denying compensation for lands taken over from zamindars. "Going back on a solemn undertaking" was "worse than robbery".¹⁸⁰

At 4 p.m. on Friday, January 30, the Mahatma and Vallabhbhai began their heart-to-heart talk at Birla House. Not far sat Manibehn. Her father spoke. Gandhi span and listened. At 4.30 p.m. Manu, the Mahatma's grand-niece, brought milk, vegetables and slices of orange, Gandhi's evening meal. Vallabhbhai's talk with him continued while he had his dinner. Gandhi repeated what he had said on the 23rd. Patel's presence in the Cabinet was indispensable, and so was Nehru's. He had already said the same thing, Gandhi added, to Jawaharlal. Any breach between Vallabhbhai and Nehru would be disastrous, and he would underline this opinion in his post-prayer speech that evening. It was decided that "all three (Gandhi, Patel and Nehru) would meet next day". Kathiawad matters, too, were discussed. At 5 p.m., Gandhi's prayer time, Abha Gandhi, another of the Mahatma's helpers, presented herself and held up a watch but neither Gandhi nor Patel paid any attention. After some minutes Manibehn said, "It is five ten," whereupon the two rose, Vallabhbhai to go home and Gandhi to walk to his prayers on the lawns of the house where he was staying.

In three minutes the Sardar and Manibehn were back at 1 Aurangzeb Road. While entering the house they were accosted by a woman who had brought a blind man. Manibehn stopped to talk with her. Vallabhbhai went inside, picked up a newspaper and sat down with it. Manibehn was outside, advising the woman to go to Neogy, the Minister for Relief, or Amrit Kaur, the Minister for Health, when she heard the screech of tyres. Brij Krishna, one of Gandhi's associates, shouted from the car that had driven in: "Where is Sardar? Bapu has been shot. Bapu is dead." Manibehn went in and told her Father: "We must go to Birla House. Brij Krishna has come. He says Bapu has been killed with a bullet." At once Vallabhbhai got into the car in which Brij Krishna had come, Manibehn joined them, and they went to Birla House.

When they got there, the Gita was being recited around Gandhi's body, which lay on a carpet on the floor. The Mahatma's face seemed "calm and serene" and forgiving to Patel. He took hold of the Mahatma's wrist and fancied a faint pulse-beat. A doctor disillusioned him. Then Patel sat down next to Gandhi's feet. Manibehn stood

behind him. Jawaharlal came a couple of minutes after Vallabhbhai, went down on his knees, put his head next to Gandhi's and cried like a child. Then he put his grieving head in the Sardar's lap. Devadas came and pleaded in his father's ear: "Speak, Bapuji, speak." Mountbatten, General Roy Bucher, the Commander-in-Chief, Vallabhbhai's Cabinet colleagues and residents of Delhi filled the room and the spaces outside Birla House. Patel "showed iron courage, gave solace to one and all" and instructed Bucher and the police chiefs "to impose strict security measures all over India and not to hesitate about saying the assassin was a Hindu." Mountbatten recalled that Gandhi had said to him that his dearest wish was to bring about full reconciliation between Nehru and Patel, whereupon Vallabhbhai and Nehru embraced each other.¹⁸¹

That night Patel and Jawaharlal spoke to the nation, the latter in Hindi and English, the Sardar only in Hindi. Said the Sardar:

Just now my dear brother, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, has spoken to you. My heart is aching. What shall I say to you? My tongue is tied. This is a day of sorrow, shame and agony for India. Today I went to Gandhiji at about 4 p.m. and was with him for about an hour....

Hardly had I reached home when somebody broke the dreadful news to me that Gandhiji was shot at thrice by a Hindu young man in the prayer ground. I immediately hurried back to Birla House and was near Gandhiji. His eyes were closed but his face was as calm and serene as before. I could even detect a streak of compassion and forgiveness over his ebbing face....

Friends, the occasion demands not anger but earnest heart-searching from us all. If we give vent to our understandable anger, it would mean that we have forgotten our beloved master's teachings so soon after his death. And let me say that even in his lifetime we only haltingly followed our master.

The burden which of late India has been called to bear is a tremendous one. It would have broken our backs if we had not the support of that great man. That support has now gone, but Gandhiji will live in our hearts for ever.... Tomorrow at 4 p.m. his body will turn to ashes but his imperishable teachings will abide with us.

The mad youth who killed him was wrong if he thought that thereby he was destroying his noble mission. Perhaps God wanted Gandhiji's mission to fulfil and prosper through his death.¹⁸²

After the broadcasts Vallabhbhai and Nehru gave thought to next day's funeral procession. At 11.30 p.m. Patel returned home and phoned Kher, the Bombay Premier. The Mahatma's assassin, Nathuram Godse, was from Kher's province. From midnight to five

a.m. Vallabhbhai lay in bed but sleep eluded him. We do not know what thoughts kept him awake, but they probably were of the past, present and future, of his thirty-year relationship with Gandhi, of his love for the Mahatma, ineradicable despite all the buffeting, of the pain of recent weeks, the relief of recent days, the joy of that final pre-prayer hour, of the shock thereafter, and of the uncertain morrow. Did he remember his pact with Gandhi to die together? Did he blame Gandhi for inviting hostility, and himself for not containing it?

Next day Patel sat grim and tired in the truck that carried the Mahatma on his last journey. As the pyre was about to be lit at Rajghat, Manu Gandhi buried her "face in the Sardar's lap and wept and wept". Looking up, she saw that the Sardar had suddenly aged.¹⁸³

* * *

"Sardar Patel should resign for the failure of his security department to protect Mahatma Gandhi. There was ample warning of brewing disaffection against Gandhiji when the bomb was thrown at his prayer meeting." So went a letter published in *The Statesman* of February 3.¹⁸⁴ That day the socialists asked for a new Home Minister "able and willing to curb the cult of and organisation of communal hate". "A man of 74," said Jayaprakash, "has departments of which even a man of 30 would find difficult to bear the burden."¹⁸⁵ In private conversation Mridula was making similar remarks. Stung, Vallabhbhai wrote out his resignation. Reminding Jawaharlal that an earlier letter of resignation was "already there", he added:

*The Statesman's correspondent takes a constitutional stand and I think he is right. This is an additional reason for my resignation....I do not wish to do anything to embarrass you at this critical juncture, but when there is a public demand, a challenge which is obviously justified, I feel I must once again request you to help me.*¹⁸⁶

As well as propriety, a desire not to presume lay behind the letter. Patel did not know whether Nehru wanted him to continue. The two had embraced, true, beside the Mahatma's body, and they had addressed the nation together, but they had not had a proper talk. Moreover, Mridula was known to be close to Nehru and Jayaprakash was in fact staying with Jawaharlal at the time. Vallabhbhai thought it more than likely that Jawaharlal shared J.P.'s view. However, his letter was not sent. Vidya Shankar, to whom Manibehn took it for being despatched, persuaded the Sardar to withhold it. He argued that the Home Ministry was not to blame for Destiny's role. The letter would only play into the hands of the Sardar's enemies and deprive the

country of the joint leadership it needed. Vallabhbhai yielded to his private secretary's persuasion.¹⁸⁷

Both Patel and Shankar had misjudged Nehru, who was unwilling to let the Sardar leave and said as much and more that very day.

Nehru to Patel, 3.2.48: With Bapu's death, everything is changed and we have to face a different and more difficult world.... I have been greatly distressed by the persistence of whispers and rumours about you and me, magnifying out of all proportion any differences we may have.... We must put an end to this mischief.

It is over a quarter century since we have closely associated with one another and have faced many storms and perils together. I can say with full honesty that during this period my affection and regard for you have grown, and I do not think anything can happen to lessen this.

Anyway, in the crisis that we have to face now after Bapu's death, I think it is my duty, and if I may venture to say, yours also for us to face it together as friends and colleagues. Not merely superficially, but in full loyalty to one another and with confidence in one another. I can assure you that you will have that from me.

I had hoped to have a long talk with you, but we are so terribly pressed for time... Meanwhile I do not want to wait for this talk and hence this letter, which carries with it my affection and friendship for you.¹⁸⁸

To this handsome letter Vallabhbhai responded in like spirit.

Patel to Nehru, 5.2.48: I am deeply touched, indeed overwhelmed, by the affection and warmth of your letter. I fully and heartily reciprocate the sentiments you have so feelingly expressed.

We both have been lifelong comrades in a common cause. The paramount interests of our country and our mutual love and regard, transcending such differences of outlook and temperament as existed, have held us together.

I had the good fortune to have a last talk with Bapu for over an hour just before his death.... His opinion also binds us both and I can assure you that I am fully resolved to approach my responsibilities and obligations in this spirit.¹⁸⁹

The previous day, addressing the Congress Party in the Constituent Assembly, Vallabhbhai had publicly expressed his solidarity with, and loyalty to, Jawaharlal. Calling him, for the first time, "my leader", Patel added:

*I am one with the Prime Minister on all national issues. For over a quarter of a century, both of us sat at the feet of our master and struggled together for the freedom of India. It is unthinkable today, when the Mahatma is no more, that we would quarrel.*¹⁹⁰

At this meeting Vallabhbhai dealt with the charge against him:

The socialists say that I have failed to protect the Mahatma. I deny the charge.... After the bomb incident, there was a police officer in almost every room. I knew Mahatma Gandhi did not like it and he had several arguments with me.... He sternly insisted that in no circumstances should I permit the search of people coming to attend the prayers.

The assassin knelt down before Mahatma Gandhi and as he rose whipped out a pistol and fired before any one could apprehend him. This was a calamitous misfortune which could not be guarded against.

After recounting his efforts to enlist the cooperation of the socialists, which had included "an offer to hand over one province to them to carry on their experiments without let or hindrance", Patel said: "And today they exploit the greatest misfortune and calamity of the nation for party ends." At this point he was overcome. For over a minute he could not speak, whereafter he picked up his papers and left.¹⁹¹ Defending Vallabhbhai, Rajaji said in Calcutta:

*Have there not been scores of occasions when Gandhiji was in the greatest danger during these 40 years, in South Africa and India? Did the Government of India protect his life? During the last few years did not the greatest anger and highest passion develop like a storm, and did he not live? Did the Government of India protect him? Is it not idiotic to blame the Government of India because God has taken him away?*¹⁹²

The RSS was banned early in February. Patel and Jawaharlal had differed in their assessment of the body, Nehru thinking it fascistic and Vallabhbhai believing it to be patriotic but misguided.¹⁹³ After receiving reports that in some places RSS men had celebrated Gandhi's assassination, Patel concluded that it was "indulging in dangerous activities"¹⁹⁴ and agreed that it should be banned. But the difference in appraisal continued. Towards the end of February Nehru told Vallabhbhai of his opinion that "Bapu's murder was not an isolated business but a part of a much larger campaign organised chiefly by the RSS".¹⁹⁵ The Sardar disagreed.

Patel to Nehru, 27.2.48: *I have kept myself almost in daily touch with the progress of the investigation regarding Bapu's assassination case. I devote a large part of my evening to discussing with Sanjeevi (head of intelligence and I.G. of Police, Delhi) the day's progress and giving instructions to him on any points that arise.*

*All the accused have given long and detailed statements.... It emerges clearly from these statements that the RSS was not involved in it at all. It was a fanatical wing of the Hindu Mahasabha that [hatched] the conspiracy and saw it through.*¹⁹⁶

Vallabhbhai himself was on the hate list of some in the Hindu Mahasabha. One of its leaders had apparently said in a speech in Bihar shortly before Gandhi's assassination that Patel, Nehru and Azad should be hanged.¹⁹⁷ Refusing, however, to condone the outbreak of violence in parts of Maharashtra against members of the Mahasabha and the RSS and against the Brahmin community to which Gandhi's assassin belonged, Vallabhbhai rebuked Kher for the Bombay Government's leniency with the offenders.¹⁹⁸

Patel's own life almost ended on March 5, five weeks after Gandhi had gone. He was sitting for lunch and had taken a spoonful of soup when, at about 1.10 p.m., he felt an agonizing pain in the chest. The others at the table, Manibehn, Shankar and Sushila Nayar, noticed that he had placed his right hand over his heart and lapsed into silence. On Sushila asking him what the matter was, Vallabhbhai admitted pain. She helped him to his bed, realized that he had suffered a heart attack and asked Shankar to summon Dr Dhanda and inform Nehru. Dhanda arrived in fifteen minutes and injected morphine. Accompanied by Indira and Feroze, Jawaharlal came at 2.15 p.m. By now Vallabhbhai was drugged but restless. Every few minutes he would open his eyes, find his Mani's face, and shut his eyes again. Sushila, too, was at the bedside. At four p.m. Patel reopened his eyes and uttered his first words after the attack: "I had to go with Bapu. He has gone alone."¹⁹⁹ Tears streamed down his face while he spoke.

Next morning, Dahyabhai, Bhanumati and their year-old boy Gautam arrived from Bombay. Hearing Gautam's sounds, Vallabhbhai asked for him. His grandchild was brought before his eyes. At 3 p.m. he told Sushila, whose presence at lunch the previous day probably saved his life: "If he (Bapu) knew, he would scold you. I was on my way to be with him and you stopped me. Everyone says – even Brij Krishna thinks so – that I did not take enough care." Recording these words that night, Manibehn also recorded that her father's eyes were humid when he said them. Earlier that day Patel had told Ghanshyamdas and the doctors that the attack was not caused "only by the burden of work". "The blow of Bapu's death was heavy," he added.²⁰⁰

The Mahatma was a constant presence. When Birla had someone sing "Vaishnava Janato", Vallabhbhai said, "Bapu was very fond of this bhajan." To Devadas, who called on March 8, he said that the attack was caused by the grief he had "bottled up in the heart". Then, his eyes twinkling, Vallabhbhai added, "But it's not too late. If you have a letter for Bapu, I will take it."²⁰¹

* * *

But the danger had passed. He would rest for four months, in Delhi, Mussoorie and Dehra Dun, and come back to carry his burdens. With some of these burdens he grappled, once the crisis was behind him, even during his illness and recuperation. Nehru was in regular touch. So were other Cabinet colleagues. Mountbatten kept Patel informed of his Hyderabad moves and frustrations – mostly the latter. Almost daily Menon reported progress on mergers and unions and sought instructions. Shankar was throughout with him, Vallabhbhai's link with the State apparatus, relaying news or problems to him, obtaining his decisions and passing them on. Sushila too stayed alongside, a 24-hour doctor and nurse who also drew her patient out on his early life – his schooling in Petlad, Baroda and Nadiad, his voyage to England, the death of his wife.... Confined for weeks to his bed, the Sardar was willing to reminisce. And there was Manibehn, whose serving hands and watchful eyes were meant for only one man.

Ere long he was moving in a wheel-chair and later on his legs. The stay in the hills, where the Birlas were once more his hosts, helped him. He breathed a purer air, talked about the past, took some phone calls, received visitors, their number increasing with each week, heard the news twice a day over his radio – he continued to be, among other things, the Minister for Information & Broadcasting –, read the newspapers and dictated letters. What he did not do was to open a book. The hunger for books that fellow-inmates in prison had noticed had left him.

Learning of the attack, Dahyabhai's first son Bipin, now 21 and a student in the U.S.A., came to Delhi to see his grandfather, who gave two pieces of advice to his grandson. One: "As long as I am in this chair, don't visit Delhi, unless I am unwell and you have to see me." The other: "All sorts of people will contact you. Take care." In warning Bipin, Vallabhbhai was also seeking to protect his own reputation.²⁰²

We may note, while Patel recuperates, some other events of the first year of India's independence. Kripalani resigned as Congress President shortly before his term was to end. While he complained that both Nehru and Vallabhbhai bypassed him, neither duumvir was happy about consulting an "outside authority", which is what the

Congress President had become after independence. At Ahmednagar and earlier, Patel and Kripalani were "considered as inseparable"²⁰³ but 1947 saw a break between the two and a continuance of the Nehru-Kripalani gulf. Gandhi wanted either Narendra Dev or Jayaprakash to succeed Kripalani but Vallabhbhai and Jawaharlal were united in their disapproval of both names. Proposed by Patel and seconded by Nehru, Prasad succeeded Kripalani in November 1947. Soon afterwards, Prasad resigned from the Cabinet but continued as President of the Constituent Assembly. The Constituent Assembly had two roles: framing free India's constitution and serving as its legislature. It needed a head, a Speaker, in its latter role. Mavlankar was elected.

India needed a head, too, for Mountbatten was leaving in the summer of 1948. Keeping to their promise of teamwork, Nehru and Vallabhbhai conferred about a successor and settled, at the end of March, on Rajaji, who had officiated as Governor-General in November 1947, when Mountbatten went to England for the marriage of Princess Elizabeth with his nephew, Philip Mountbatten. Hesitating at first, C.R. proposed that Nehru should succeed Mountbatten and let Patel become Prime Minister. Such an arrangement, Rajaji wrote to Nehru, "would be of great international value besides being an efficient arrangement for internal affairs."²⁰⁴ Despite C.R.'s admission of his preference for the Sardar as Premier, Nehru insisted that Rajaji should accept the Governor-Generalship and come to Delhi, and Vallabhbhai urged likewise. "After Bapu's death," he wrote, "it is all the more essential that the remnant of his circle should pull its weight together."²⁰⁵ Agreeing, C.R. took over from Mountbatten in June.

A month later Nehru moved from his York Road house to the mansion where British Commanders-in-Chief used to reside. Mountbatten had advised the shift, and Nehru agreed to it while Patel was recovering his strength in the hills. It had the unfortunate and unintended effect of putting a stop to Nehru's practice of frequently stepping across to 1 Aurangzeb Road for a few minutes, usually followed by the Sardar walking with Nehru to the gate of the latter's house. The C.-in-C.'s house was too far from Aurangzeb Road for such civilities.

Roy Bucher, the Army chief, lunched with Vallabhbhai on May 31 at Dehra Dun. "The Sardar always reminded me," Bucher would write later, "of the pictures of Roman emperors in history books. There was something rock-like in his appearance and demeanour." After lunch, as Manibehn would note in her diary, "Father and Bucher talked alone for an hour in the office." Bucher's account of this meeting is of interest:

The Sardar took me into his private office and said: "I am now going to tell you of certain matters. If you repeat what I have said I will merely say that you have lied, and everyone will believe me." He then added that everyone thought that he was anti-Muslim but that was not the case at all. He was quite ready to guarantee the safety and well-being of Muslims all over India.

*He next told me that he would not oppose some form of settlement over Kashmir, but if any boundaries were to be agreed they must be capable of being recognized on the ground.*²⁰⁶

Even in private Vallabhbhai did not spell out the Kashmir settlement he would accept. However, Mountbatten and Menon were sympathetic to a proposal to partition Kashmir, which had come up before Gandhi's death. The Mahatma had told both of them that he was opposed to it.²⁰⁷ At the end of May Mountbatten brought it up again. He had convinced himself that "an agreement between India and Hyderabad" was "about to materialise"²⁰⁸ and, not surprisingly, wished to solve Kashmir as well before leaving India. It was as Mountbatten's emissary that Bucher had gone to Patel, whose willingness to accept a Kashmir settlement based on partition was, as we have seen, guarded and private. It was also conditional on Hyderabad coming to terms, to Vallabhbhai an unlikely prospect. He told Bucher that "he had never thought that Lord Mountbatten would obtain a satisfactory acceptance of the Indian Government's proposals from the Nizam's Government".²⁰⁹ Discovering in due course that Patel was right and Mountbatten wrong on Hyderabad, Bucher would observe that "the Sardar's reading of the pulse of India was almost uncanny in its accuracy".²¹⁰ As for Kashmir, Mountbatten would write:

Mr Liaqat Ali Khan was due to come to Delhi for a meeting with Pandit Nehru.... The solution of the Kashmir problem which I would have backed, had Mr Liaqat Ali Khan come, would have been based on the partition of the State. At my request Mr Gopalaswami Ayyangar and Mr V. P. Menon had worked out a compromise which they said the Indian Cabinet would accept if Mr Liaqat Ali Khan put it up. It was my intention to have suggested to Mr Liaqat Ali Khan that he should put this forward as a proposal.

Evidently "the partition maps were all marked up and discussed between Nehru and Bucher". But Mountbatten was obliged to record that "no agreement was reached between India and Hyderabad.... And Mr Liaqat Ali Khan, because he fell ill, did not come to Delhi".²¹¹

An enormously rich shabbily-dressed miser and something of a poet, Nizam Usman Ali Khan of Hyderabad believed in his own importance. The British Government had disappointed him by refusing to treat Hyderabad as a Dominion or to help a bid of his to buy Goa from the Portuguese, which would have given him an outlet to the sea. He could join India or defy her but was unable to choose. Waiting on events, he authorized negotiations with India as well as secret defiance.

He did not deign, however, to visit Delhi himself for talks. Though supposedly advised by Sir Walter Monckton and by a council led by his Premier, the Nawab of Chhatari, the Nizam was under the influence of a young man called Kasim Razvi who headed the Ittehad-ul-Musilmeen, a body dedicated to maintaining Muslim supremacy in the State. The Razakars formed the Ittehad's militant wing. At the end of October 1947, Razvi had forced the Nizam to withdraw his assent to an agreement that Monckton and Chhatari had reached with New Delhi. His council had advised the Nizam to sign it, and the Nizam had told Monckton and Chhatari that he would. Razvi then mounted a gherao, 20,000 Muslims surrounded the houses in which Monckton and Chhatari were staying, and the Nizam yielded.

On October 28 Razvi told Monckton and Chhatari in the Nizam's presence that "the hands of the Indian Union are so fully occupied with their troubles elsewhere that they will be in no position to do anything to us":²¹² he was alluding to the tribal invasion that had just taken place in Kashmir. On Razvi's suggestion, the Nizam replaced Chhatari with Mir Laik Ali, a prominent Hyderabad businessman who had been on Pakistan's delegation to the UN. Razvi visited Delhi himself in November, called on the Sardar and told him, "We shall fight and die to the last man." Vallabhbhai answered: "How can I stop you from committing suicide?"²¹³ Also meeting Razvi, Menon noticed his "fanaticism bordering on frenzy".²¹⁴

Despite the Nizam's volte face and the substitution of Laik Ali for Chhatari, a Standstill Agreement was signed, as we saw earlier, on November 29. At the end of January, Patel told Laik Ali in Delhi that he was less interested in accession than in an internal settlement in Hyderabad. Its Hindus were insecure. A large number, including members of the Prajamandal, were in jail. Vallabhbhai said to Laik Ali that India would restrain herself if Hyderabad gave Hindus a say in government. The thought became the Government of India's call to Hyderabad: either accede or introduce representative government.

To the Nizam and the men guiding him, however, democracy was as unattractive as accession to India. They arranged a secret loan of Rs 20 crores to Pakistan, whose support was essential if the Nizam was to stand up to India. The Razakars were financed and armed. On

the other hand, India withdrew from Hyderabad the Indian Army units posted there before August 15, 1947, thereby fulfilling a clause in the Standstill Agreement. The Nizam, however, complained in April 1948 – through Monckton – that “very few goods of any nature” had been allowed into Hyderabad for three months. Mountbatten and Nehru assured Monckton – Patel had had his heart attack by this time – that the Government of India had never intended or authorized any blockade, but Mountbatten added that junior officers or provincial ministers might have connived at it. “The merchants themselves may have decided not to send any goods to Hyderabad,” Nehru said.²¹⁵

While Monckton was in Delhi the newspapers published a speech by Razvi in which he not only urged the Muslims of Hyderabad “to march forward with the Koran in one hand and the sword in the other” but added: “The 45 million Muslims in the Indian Union would be our fifth column in any showdown.”²¹⁶ Confronted with the report, Monckton promised that on his return to Hyderabad he would advise the Nizam to arrest Razvi. It was also his intention, added Monckton, to urge the Nizam to introduce responsible and representative government at an early date.²¹⁷ However, on April 11, Monckton wired Mountbatten to the effect that Razvi had never made the speech published in India. The next day the Associated Press of India, the news agency linked to Reuter, reported a fresh Razvi utterance: “The day is not far when the waves of the Bay of Bengal will be washing the feet of our sovereign.”²¹⁸ On April 15 Laik Ali arrived in Delhi and declared that the account of Razvi’s “fifth column” speech was false. Despite his illness, Vallabhbhai insisted on meeting Laik Ali and telling him that he had irrefutable proof about the Razvi speech and would not accept any denial. Plain words followed.

*You know as well as I do where power resides in Hyderabad. The gentleman who seems to dominate Hyderabad (Razvi) has categorically stated that if the Indian Dominion comes to Hyderabad, it will find nothing but the ashes and bones of one and a half crore Hindus. If that is the position, then it seriously undermines the whole future of the Nizam and his dynasty.*²¹⁹

After informing Laik Ali that it was impossible for India to tolerate “an isolated spot which would destroy the very Union which we have built up with our blood and toil”, Patel asked the visitor to return to Hyderabad, consult the Nizam, and come to a final decision “so that both of us know where we stand”.²²⁰ This was not the language that Laik Ali had heard from Nehru or Mountbatten; Menon saw that Laik Ali “was completely taken aback” by the Sardar’s frankness and had little to say to him. With Mountbatten and Nehru, however, Laik Ali

took the line that Munshi, India's Agent-General in Hyderabad, was to blame for sending alarmist reports. Menon pointed out that the provincial governments of Bombay, Madras and the C.P. had made independent and detailed allegations of Razakar lawlessness on the border. In the end Laik Ali and Monckton were told that New Delhi expected the Nizam to do at least four things: bring the Razakars under control, release the leaders of the Prajamandal, bring more Hindus into his government and form a Constituent Assembly by the end of the year.

The Nizam did none of the things but sent Laik Ali to Delhi on May 23. Asked to restate India's minimum requirements, Menon told Laik Ali that while he could in no way commit the Sardar or the Government of India, he was prepared to draft Heads of Agreement in order to "focus the points of discussion". For the next four weeks Menon and Monckton worked on the draft, each revising the other's alterations. When, half-way through this exercise, Menon reported the state of play to the Sardar in Dehra Dun, Vallabhbhai revealed his unhappiness and disagreement. Menon was told that he was wasting time producing formulas and discussing them. All that the Hyderabadis deserved was "a brief letter calling for accession and responsible government".²²¹ Letters from Patel to Nehru and Mountbatten conveyed the same message.

But Mountbatten was most reluctant to accept it. His conspicuous "personal desire to achieve a settlement before he leaves" had given him, in Campbell-Johnson's words, "a subjective approach to the problem".²²² It was not for want of trying that a glorious exit eluded him. He convinced Nehru, cajoled Monckton and prodded Menon. And to obtain Vallabhbhai's agreement he made an irresistible gesture. Though unlikely to be accurate in every detail, Mountbatten's account of his June 13 encounter with Patel is correct in essence:

Monckton redrafted the Heads of Agreement with Laik Ali and other Hyderabad Ministers and obtained the approval of the Nizam himself. He pointed out to His Exalted Highness that the terms were now so heavily weighted in Hyderabad's favour that it would be a miracle if India accepted.

Monckton flew to Delhi and showed them to V. P. Menon and myself. We both thought Patel would not be able to accept the new Heads of Agreement, and Monckton saw this clearly but urged me to try.

I was due to fly to say goodbye to Sardarji.... I took with me in my aeroplane Nehru, Prasad, Gopalaswami and Baldev Singh. I told them I planned to hand the new Heads of Agreement to Vallabhbhai to initial, if they agreed. They were confident he would not agree but said if he did initial, they would abide by it.

Soon after arrival, I gave the paper to Patel to read. He grunted: "Impertinence. I will never initial it." I then dropped the subject and we all had a pleasant lunch tinged with sadness as he and I knew we would be unlikely to see each other again.

After lunch Sardarji became quite emotional, and spoke of the debt India owed me. "How can we prove to you our love and gratitude?" he asked. I hardened my heart, for I too was affected, and replied, "If you are sincere, sign this document." Sardarji was visibly taken aback. "Does agreement with Hyderabad mean so much to you?" he asked in a low voice.

"Yes," I replied, "because India's good name is at stake." Patel initialled the draft and embraced me with tears. The others, although astonished, accepted this and I flew to Delhi elated at my success and handed the initialled copy to Walter Monckton. He could hardly believe his luck and flew at once to Hyderabad with it.²²³

Glory was not Mountbatten's only aim. Avoidance of massacres was another. He feared that drastic Indian action might lead to the killing of Hindus in Hyderabad and, next, of Muslims in India. Only nine months having elapsed since the Punjab massacres, several shared Mountbatten's fears, including Bucher and, to some extent, Nehru.²²⁴ Vallabhbhai thought these fears to be false, and when, at the end of May, Bucher (and some Indian army officers) warned him that military action in Hyderabad might involve most of the military, Patel answered that he was quite ready to guarantee the safety and well-being of Muslims all over India, that the police armed and unarmed could ensure this, and that he did not need the military for internal security purposes.²²⁵

The Heads of Agreement initialled by Vallabhbhai provided that the Nizam's Government would, if requested by New Delhi, pass legislation similar to that of India on any matter of defence, external affairs and communications; the Hyderabad Army would be restricted to a maximum of 20,000 plus 8,000 irregulars; the Razakars would be progressively disbanded; and Hyderabad's foreign relations, apart from trade agencies, would be conducted by India. Also, the Nizam would declare that he would hold a plebiscite, form a Constituent Assembly and install an Interim Government in consultation with the leaders of the major political parties. New Delhi's earlier insistence that at least one half of the new Government must be non-Muslim had been dropped.

Armed with the Government of India's unexpected acceptance, Laik Ali left for Hyderabad on June 15; Monckton followed on June 16. They were to obtain the Nizam's signature. On June 17 Monckton sent a one-word message to Mountbatten: "Lost." The Nizam and his

council had raised a series of fresh points.* Mountbatten's bitter disappointment did not find an echo in Patel's heart. In fact the Sardar believed (and also secretly hoped) that the Nizam would refuse and a breakdown would ensue.²²⁷ The future proved him right and Mountbatten wrong but it did not prove that Vallabhbhai was wrong in yielding to Mountbatten's request. Mountbatten's verdict that the mid-June exercise entitled the Government of India to intervene in Hyderabad with a clear conscience was of value to India.²²⁸

Though out of Delhi from the end of April and convalescing, Patel had not been inert over Hyderabad. Making known his support for an economic blockade,²²⁹ he had also persuaded the Cabinet in the middle of May to authorise preparations for military action.²³⁰ Nehru had warned that sending the Army into Hyderabad could hurt India's military position in Kashmir, and the Chiefs of the Army, the Navy and the Air Force (all Britons) had termed it "a hazardous military gamble".²³¹ Senior Indian officers too seemed to agree that "operations against Hyderabad should be postponed until after the monsoon".²³² The defence chiefs' fear that "if we move into Hyderabad we will be very short of troops for internal security purposes in the rest of the country"²³³ was conveyed to Vallabhbhai. Passed on by Menon to the Cabinet's Defence Committee, Patel's response to the warning was in the following terms:

*It is not, in the final analysis, the action of an Army which maintains law and order – look at the Punjab last August, when 55,000 men could not stop the massacres. It is rather the prestige of the Government backed by potential armed action which keeps the people in order. At the moment this prestige is sufficiently high to take action against Hyderabad and maintain order elsewhere at the same time. But if the Government delays action against Hyderabad much longer, then its prestige will fall so greatly that no amount of troops will be sufficient for internal security.*²³⁴

Persuaded by Vallabhbhai's message, the Defence Committee decided on May 13 that military preparations should go forward. Still in the country and still the chairman of the Defence Committee, Mountbatten recorded:

Pandit Nehru said openly at the meeting, and subsequently assured me privately, that he would not allow any orders to be given for operations to start unless there really was an event, such as a wholesale massacre of Hindus within the State, which

* Returning to Delhi, Monckton told Mountbatten that Laik Ali had spent three hours with Razvi before seeing the Nizam.²²⁶

*would patently justify, in the eyes of the world, action by the Government of India.*²³⁵

Patel was not willing to give any such assurance. For him Hyderabad's duplicity was reason enough for "firm and definite action".²³⁶ The countdown for Hyderabad began, if not on June 21, the date on which Mountbatten left, then on July 5, when the Sardar returned to Delhi. With his espousal the blockade became official and tighter. Hyderabad played into his hands by hiring gun-runners who were taking off at night from airports in Pakistan and touching down on landing strips in Bidar and Warangal in Hyderabad. Other developments reinforced the case for intervention. Razakars and Communists appeared to be forging closer links. In some border villages "the Razakars ruled by day while the Communists ruled by night".²³⁷ At the end of July, a Hindu member of the Nizam's council, J. V. Joshi, resigned, charging that the police and the Razakars had jointly terrorized Hindus in Hyderabad's western districts and that many Hindus were leaving the State. Attacks on Indian villages near the border and on Indian trains passing through Hyderabad were reported, and there was an allegation that Razakars had assaulted foreign missionaries and molested some nuns.

There were counter-charges and counter-moves. Laik Ali alleged on August 17 that there was a total economic blockade and that Indian troops had repeatedly violated Hyderabad territory. He said that the UN was being approached. The Nizam requested the President of the United States to arbitrate but the latter refused.

While Patel pressed for intervention, Jawaharlal, conscious of his word to Mountbatten, tried to avoid and postpone it. But the Cabinet was with Vallabhbhai, and so was the new Governor-General, Rajaji. Writing to Mountbatten of his isolation – "I am completely distrusted by large numbers of people here"²³⁸ –, Nehru yielded and agreed that C.R. should ask the Nizam to ban the Razakars and invite the Indian Army. Rajaji's letter went on August 31. A telegram in reply came on September 5. Banning the Razakars was "impracticable", the Nizam said, and letting Indian troops into his territory was "out of question".²³⁹

There was only one course to take now but Jawaharlal had second thoughts. Menon has described a Cabinet meeting on September 8:

The States Ministry pressed their view that we should occupy Hyderabad and put a stop to the chaos there. The Prime Minister was strongly opposed and was very critical of the attitude of the States Ministry. Sardar left the meeting in the middle. The same afternoon the Governor-General called a meeting in his room of the

*Prime Minister, Sardar Patel and myself. It was then decided to occupy Hyderabad.*²⁴⁰

Next day the Cabinet Defence Committee concluded, in consultation with Lt.-Gen. Rajendrasinhji, head of the Southern Command, that the border should be crossed on the 13th. An ultimatum was, however, telegraphed to the Nizam on September 10: inaction by him would "force the Government of India to act on their initiative".²⁴¹ When Munshi phoned Vallabhbhai on the 11th with the text of the Nizam's evasive reply, the Sardar joked that it was yet a war of telegrams.²⁴²

That night Jinnah died in Karachi. Vallabhbhai learnt of the event in the early hours of the 12th. As Home Minister he had to decide whether or not Indian flags should be lowered. When Bidhan Roy, the West Bengal Premier, raised the question over the telephone, Patel replied, "Why? Was he your relative?"²⁴³ However, he accepted, though with reluctance, the opinion given by three Secretaries – H.V.R. Iengar (who had moved to Home), H. M. Patel (Defence) and Menon (States) – that the death of a sister Dominion's Governor-General had to be suitably marked.²⁴⁴ On the night of the 12th Munshi phoned to say that he was about to be interned by the Hyderabad Government. "We will intern their Agent-General here," replied Vallabhbhai. Then he added: "But you will lose the chance of martyrdom if they intern you."²⁴⁵

Even as war on the ground was about to start the war of telegrams continued. To the Nizam's latest message the Sardar wanted a two-line reply to go from the Governor-General: "Repeated denials cannot alter facts. I have nothing to add."²⁴⁶ Jawaharlal and C.R., however, had agreed to a longer text that stressed the goal of peace that India had in mind in wishing to send troops. Vallabhbhai saw this text at 7.30 p.m. on September 12 and at once expressed his disagreement. At his instance H. M. Patel and Menon called on Rajaji at 10 p.m. The Governor-General and the Sardar's aides debated the draft for three hours. Next day C.R. complained to the Sardar: "You had sent two cantankerous men who argued and argued until one o'clock."²⁴⁷ Yet the officials had fulfilled Patel's purpose, which was to delay the dispatch of Rajaji's telegram and thus deny the Nizam a chance to change his stance before the troops crossed the border.²⁴⁸

Operation Polo, as the Army had named it, commenced before dawn on the 13th, but not without General Bucher making a final bid to postpone it. He rang H. M. Patel at 3 a.m. to convey "a reliable report" that Hyderabad had acquired some big planes. Adding that the planes might be bombers, Bucher proposed a delay of a few hours until the report was verified. H.M. said he disagreed.²⁴⁹

Delivering the main blow, the 1st Armoured Division advanced eastward along the 186-mile Sholapur-Hyderabad route. Other units attacked simultaneously from the east, along the 160-mile Bezwada-Hyderabad route, confusing the enemy's high command about the direction of the principal attack. Incursions at half a dozen other points increased the confusion. Lt-Gen Rajendrasinhji guided, and Maj-Gen J. N. Chaudhuri commanded, Polo. It had been meticulously researched. A swift conclusion was the planners' aim: that would minimize reprisal killings. Crossing on schedule the vital Naldrug bridge, 12 miles inside Hyderabad, elements of the 1st Armoured Division captured a Briton in the Nizam's employ called Lt. T. T. Moore who was proceeding to destroy the bridge: he had been found in a jeep laden with explosives. A day's postponement would have lengthened Polo by a week or more.

Razakar resistance was stiffer than the State troops', but everything was over by the evening of the 17th. At lunch time that day Bucher had gone to Patel with an intercept of a message in which Maj-Gen El Edroos, commander of the Hyderabad Army, asked his troops to yield. Later that evening Hyderabad radio confirmed the news and the next day Edroos formally surrendered to Chaudhuri. Mercifully, Polo produced no reprisal killings. If this surprised and relieved Jawaharlal, Vallabhbhai experienced somewhat similar emotions on finding that Muslims in different parts of India had backed his action. "On the question of Hyderabad," he wrote to Suhrawardy, "the Indian Union Muslims have come out in the open on our side and that has certainly created a good impression."²⁵⁰

Indian casualties in the five-day action were 42 killed, 97 wounded and 24 missing. The Hyderabad Army lost 490 of its men and had 122 of them wounded. Razakar figures were 2,727 killed, 102 wounded and 3,364 captured.²⁵¹ Razvi's rhetoric had exacted a heavy price. He was arrested on the 19th; several other Ittehad leaders were also detained in their houses.

But the Nizam was spared. More than that, he was retained as Hyderabad's formal ruler. Maj-Gen Chaudhuri, who took over on September 18 as Military Governor, was later confirmed in that post through a firman of the Nizam! Despite everything, the Nizam had a prestige in the world and among India's Muslims; he had reigned for over 37 years and was a symbol of authority; it was wiser to give him a place than to uproot him. Patel accepted this view after Polo was over but he had been against it during the exercise. On the 14th he had said in the Cabinet with some heat: "The Nizam is finished. We cannot keep this ulcer in the heart of the Union. His dynasty is finished."²⁵² Jawaharlal exploded at this and left. Later Vallabhbhai agreed that as a constitutional head the Nizam could not do much harm.

After his defeat the Nizam duly acceded to India, disowned the Razakars, withdrew the complaint to the UN, accepted a constitutional role, welcomed representative rule and surrendered his vast holdings of land. He would have earned the goodwill of Hyderabad's Hindus, and the gratitude of India's Muslims, if he had made these gestures a few months earlier. Though he continued to avoid going to Delhi, he was at the airport when, in February 1949, the Sardar made his first visit after Polo to Hyderabad. The Nizam folded his hands to greet his victor. Earlier, spotting the Nizam from his plane, Vallabhbhai had said to Shankar, "So His Exhausted Highness is here."²⁵³ But he offered a smile and a namaste when the Nizam welcomed him.

Patel was frank when they met for a talk. Chaudhuri and Shankar were present. Vallabhbhai brought up the Razakars, the dealings with Pakistan, the Nizam's refusal to listen to moderate voices like Monckton's and the Nawab of Chhatari's. The Nizam gave such explanations as he could. Then Patel asked Shankar to recite a verse written by the Nizam which extolled the defeat of the conch and the sacred thread. At this the Nizam pleaded for forgiveness, told the Sardar that he was "genuinely sorry for what had happened and wished it had not" and pledged his loyalty to the Government of India, to whom, he said, he had "consigned his position and prestige".²⁵⁴ Returning to Delhi, Vallabhbhai wrote to the Nizam:

*Dear Exalted Highness, I was very glad to meet you and make your acquaintance.... I was also very happy to learn that Your Exalted Highness had adapted yourself so readily to changed conditions. As I told your Exalted Highness, while error is a human failing, and divine injunctions all point to forgetting and forgiving, it is the duty of human beings to contribute their share to this process by sincere repentance. I should like once more to repeat that advice, which is in all sincerity intended to be friendly.*²⁵⁵

Patel's work of unifying India was completed by what Hyderabad's ruling clique saw as takeover, its Hindu majority as liberation and Vallabhbhai himself as the quelling of a rebellion. He would continue to readjust some internal boundaries but all the apples bar Kashmir were safely in the old gardener's sack. He himself had not coveted that Muslim-majority State, which involved him only after, and because, raiders from Pakistan had invaded it. The Nizam's surrender fulfilled Vallabhbhai's dream of a unified India thirteen months after the goal of independence had been realized. "The thirsty traveller had been given a pot with no neck or bottom but with nine holes.' But India's master potter made it whole."²⁵⁶

The climax of Patel's striving, the Nizam's defeat was also the culmination of the process of history that brought Muslim rule over a Hindu majority to an end. Of this process and the facts of its culmination and his central role, Vallabhbhai was fully aware. This knowledge made him not vain or nervous but proud. We see a touch of this pride in his encounter with the Nizam: here Patel squares, on behalf of Hindus, an ancient account with the Muslims. In righting the Delhi-Hyderabad equation, he has also righted the Hindu-Muslim one. His frankness with the Nizam is of a rough and even brutal kind. He arraigns and exposes a defeated adversary in front of others. He does so because he cannot entirely forget, in his moment of triumph, past wrongs on Hindus. Yet if the victor bears a trace of an avenger's tongue, he wholly spares us, as he spared the Nizam, the hypocrite's. He allowed the Nizam to know his mind. While ready to hurt, Vallabhbhai was thus also ready to be a friend. We may discern, finally, that the victor who could not help rebuking a loser was also one who tried to minister to the loser's soul. The 73-year-old man in white khadi who called on the Nizam at King Kothi was victor, avenger, friend – and priest!

NINE
1948-50
SOLDIER



VALLABHBHAI'S prestige was at its height on his 73rd birthday, which arrived six weeks after the Nizam's surrender. The unifier was also, on that day, Acting Prime Minister: Jawaharlal had gone abroad on a five-week tour. "Everyone in India is in an excitement of joy over you," wrote Rajaji.¹ The Sardar spent the day in Dahyabhai's flat in Bombay and received a pile of telegrams, including one from Nehru, and an endless sequence of visitors and phone calls. Some ailing friends came straight from their hospital beds. The Nizam's son paid his respects. The Bombay Government held a reception in the Secretariat. The BPCC presented Vallabhbhai with a silver bust of the Mahatma. Not revealing their names, a group of friends gave him a miniature in gold of the Asoka pillar. Another admirer brought an oil portrait of the Sardar. The Kanugas were in his thoughts: he phoned Nandubehn in Ahmedabad and, as Manibehn noted, appeared "extremely happy" after the conversation.² As Acting Prime Minister he wrote two letters to provincial Premiers. They covered a wide field: Berlin, Japan, China, Indonesia, Burma, the UN and "the bitter and hostile criticism between the two blocks"³ plus several internal problems. While not necessarily proving that Vallabhbhai was filled with curiosity about the world, the letters dispose of the charge that he was an "Indian isolationist".⁴

The summit leads but to a downward slope. The equation in the duumvirate was altering in Jawaharlal's favour. The diminution in Patel's power was neither steep nor sudden. The Mahatma's death had started the process. The Sardar had never called Nehru "my leader" while Gandhi was alive. Jawaharlal was no doubt Prime Minister and the holder of a higher office but Vallabhbhai could always take a disagreement with him to Gandhi. That he seldom did so, or that the Mahatma frequently threw his weight behind Nehru, did not affect the virtual equality between Patel and Jawaharlal that Gandhi's presence ensured. His going removed the equality and made Nehru the Sardar's chief. Vallabhbhai's heart attack and the four months of enforced rest underscored the new relationship. Then came the Hyderabad action. The Sardar's image glittered. Yet he was well

aware of Nehru's primacy and popularity. "They come for Jawahar, not for me," he told Vincent Sheean, referring to an immense crowd that had surrounded him and Nehru in Bombay.⁵ A fortnight after Hyderabad's surrender Vallabhbhai again called Nehru "my leader".⁶ A little later, on November 14, 1948 – Jawaharlal's 59th birthday –, Patel was even more categorical:

*Mahatma Gandhi named Pandit Nehru as his heir and successor. Since Gandhiji's death we have realized that our leader's judgment was correct.*⁷

* * *

The left assailed him. Writing in July 1949, Asoka Mehta, the socialist, admitted Vallabhbhai's roles in independence and integration, said that he was "carved out of the stuff of which history is made", but added:

*Sardar's economic policies are leading the country to disaster.... The fostering of Birla bees and Dalmia cows has brought no honey or milk to our starving peoples. His capitalist friends and advisers are taking Sardar Patel along the wrong track.... We need [an economic] wizard but such men do not sit on the treasury benches nor are they to be found among those who perambulate behind the Sardar during his morning walks.*⁸

Vallabhbhai's support for the Indian National Trade Union Congress (INTUC), the federation of pro-Congress unions founded in 1948, also came in for attack. INTUC, it was alleged, was "formed by a caucus of Congressmen". "Spoonfed by owners and employers", it "refused to function on a class level". "In the building up of INTUC," Mehta charged, "Sardar's dream of class collaboration is fully realized."⁹ Vallabhbhai's claim that he only wanted unions to try mediation or arbitration before picking up a fight was disbelieved.

No doubt Patel rubbed shoulders with the rich, allowed them to walk beside him, accepted their hospitality and refrained from calling them names. But he stuck to his simple life and sought no comfort or wealth for himself or his family; his rich acquaintances were his tools and he their master. The unpretentiousness of the one-room apartment in Ahmedabad in which Manibehn would live in the 1980s would prove the honour and rectitude in the proud Patidar's relationship with the Birlas and Walchands of this world, as well as his independence of them. Not surprisingly, they had greater respect for him than for the "leftists" who took their money and abused them. Changing his views after the Sardar's death, Mehta would say in 1980:

[The Sardar] was not pro-princes. He gave very good terms, but he solved the problem....Landlords he would not have supported because he himself belonged to the sturdy peasantry.... As far as the capitalists were concerned, he really felt that they were needed. And he felt that he could control them, he could limit their gains in the wider interest.

Looking back, perhaps, in those very difficult years, in 1946-47-48, he had a case. It was a question of India surviving or not surviving....I think we did not, at least I failed to, take that fact into account.¹⁰

After hearing an ardent socialist's denunciation of inequality and of the riches of a particular man, Vallabhbhai retorted: "I know how much money he has. If it were divided equally among all Indians, your share will come to about four annas. I will give it to you from my own pocket if you agree to stop talking about inequality."¹¹ Yet the socialists were a factor in the land, and at independence Patel had tried to build on his friendship with them that Quit India had engendered. In August or September 1947 he asked Jayaprakash to spell out "any specific programme that you want us to follow". Realizing "the seriousness behind the Sardar's offer", J.P. and his socialist friends drafted a policy statement but Vallabhbhai found it "impractical and academic". After the Sardar's death J.P. would "unhesitatingly" admit that the document was "a sample of bookish socialism", but that was not the socialists' reaction in 1947.¹² Vallabhbhai also asked the socialists "to select a province and run it on their socialist principles". If they did better than others, he would gladly "hand over the country to them".¹³

But Jayaprakash, Rammanohar Lohia, who too would afterwards recall the offer,¹⁴ and the other socialists did not respond, and the idea fell by the wayside. As for Patel's "capitalist friends and advisers", he recognised their ability and enterprise and also remembered the risks some of them had taken while supporting Congress's movements against the Raj. His advice to Matthai, the Finance Minister, was that while Congress's rich friends should be proceeded against for any post-independence violations of the law, their earlier errors should be overlooked.¹⁵

Though the future would acknowledge Vallabhbhai's commonsense, his post-Hyderabad rhetoric was not as attractive as Jawaharlal's. Patel urged discipline in Congress and hard work in factories and farms. Jawaharlal attacked landlords, capitalists and imperialists. His fights seemed exciting fights, as were the Sardar's earlier duels with the Raj and the Rajas. The call for plain toil was less appealing. Nehru's popularity increased, moreover, with his appearances on the world stage, where he was hailed as an emissary

of peace and justice. It was a development that Vallabhbhai could not match.

There were other indications of change. Vallabhbhai was inclined to recall the past. He went to Nagpur and remembered the Flag Satyagraha of 1923. In January 1949 he visited Bardoli for the first time after independence and everybody recalled the 1928 struggle. Patel told the pedigree and age of the Ashram's trees. Universities honoured him: the farm boy who lacked money for college was made a Doctor of Laws by the universities of Punjab, Nagpur and Osmania. The events were notable but pointed to the past rather than the future.

Vallabhbhai could have retired in a blaze of glory and escaped the need to concede Nehru's primacy. Yet at their last meeting the Mahatma had enjoined him to stay at Nehru's side, and the national interest too seemed to ask for it. The Constitution was being framed. Mergers of states were incomplete. India needed to see Patel and Nehru together, and Jawaharlal needed a counterweight. Rejecting the temptation to quit and grumble, Vallabhbhai chose to remain in second place and work. In February 1949 he said:

*I have considered myself a soldier in the service of Hindustan and shall be a soldier to the end of my life. May I cease to exist when I deflect from this path of service.*¹⁶

He had figured out his attitude to Nehru. It would be a combination of frankness and loyalty. He would stop short of defying Jawaharlal – he would not “assert [himself] against any determined course of policy which [Nehru] adumbrated”.¹⁷ But he would tell him exactly what he felt. If diminished, his influence was still very large. The party was still as much with him as with Nehru. And his figure was formidable yet. The granite head had shrunk a little, the face and forehead had more lines than before and the shoulders a hint of a stoop – marks left by age and the heart attack – but this man who was not, at his straightest, more than 5' 5 1/2" still seemed a “figure of monumental proportions”.¹⁸ The Sardar's will and his nerves – “filaments of ice”¹⁹ – enlarged his size in the onlooker's eyes while his own continued to bore into the visitor.

An occasional caller, the aviator-industrialist J.R.D. Tata, would retain the impact of Patel's “simple good sense and logic” and contrast it with Nehru's mould of thought. “While I usually came back from talks with Jawaharlal fired with emotional zeal but often confused and unconvinced, meetings with Vallabhbhai were a joy from which I returned with renewed confidence in the future of our country.”^{19a}

Some callers met the Sardar only because he had noticed them before Manibehn, jealous of her father's depleting energy, could send

them away. On learning from one such visitor of a sudden shortage of grain in Gujarat, Vallabhbhai saw to the dispatch the next day of a trainload of grain for Ahmedabad. On another occasion the Sardar observed that a visitor from Gujarat who had managed to circumvent Manibehn looked ill; a bed in a Delhi hospital was found for him. Scope for kingly and "irregular" gestures of this kind was, however, narrow.^{19b}

* * *

At the end of October 1948 Pattabhi was elected Congress President, defeating Purshottamdas Tandon of the U.P. Vallabhbhai and Nehru had professed neutrality, eschewed lobbying and agreed to "leave the election to the electors",²⁰ but every Congress voter knew that Patel preferred Tandon over his Ahmednagar colleague and admirer and that Jawaharlal disapproved of Tandon's conservative views. In a private letter Jawaharlal had assured Pattabhi that he "would welcome his election if he got elected".²¹ To Vallabhbhai's disappointment, Prasad too favoured Pattabhi, though also privately.²² Pattabhi obtained 1199 votes to Tandon's 1085, the close contest revealing the equality in Congress's loyalty to the Sardar and Nehru. Eighteen months later, Tandon would succeed Pattabhi in Congress's chair, winning an election in which Patel and Nehru were more openly involved than in 1948.

Despite their divergence over the party President, the Big Two presented a joint front when Congress met in Jaipur in December 1948 under Pattabhi's chairmanship. The socialists had left Congress, the RSS was engaged in an all-India stir against the Government, the Communists in violence in Hyderabad, and the Akalis were restive. "I will not hesitate for a moment to put down my own son," Vallabhbhai told the session, "if by his actions the country's freedom was endangered."²³ And in a rare use of the phrase, Patel said the Congress and the Government were determined "to make India a truly secular state".²⁴ The Vallabhbhai-Nehru relationship had in fact again entered a satisfactory phase, with each recognizing the other's usefulness. While Patel could not deny India's fondness for Nehru or his international standing, Jawaharlal made a noteworthy acknowledgement: "But for Sardar's affection and advice, I would not have been able to run the state."²⁵ Patel's value was underscored afresh when, in February 1949, Master Tara Singh announced that Akali jathas led by him would arrive in Delhi and press their demands. Vallabhbhai had the Sikh leader arrested at Narela station, 17 miles outside Delhi, and the other agitators also immobilised. "To have detained Tara Singh gave me the greatest pain and sorrow," he said a fortnight later. "But I had no alternative. In his policy I saw the death

of the India we cherish."²⁶ Only Patel could provide the resolve and tactical skills needed at that moment.

It was because he seemed their sentinel that a wave of anxiety and fear went through Indians when All India Radio announced at 9 p.m. on March 29 that contact with a plane carrying the Sardar from Delhi to Jaipur had been lost. The anxiety was for Vallabhbhai, the fear for themselves. Accompanied by Manibehn, the Maharaja of Jodhpur and Shankar, Patel had left Palam at 5.32 p.m. in a twin-engined RIAF Dove. Jaipur was 158 miles away, reachable in less than an hour. Though the small plane did not seem to pick up speed or climb rapidly enough, the pilot, Ft.-Lt. Bhim Rao, was not unduly worried: he had in fact been instructed not to take the Sardar higher than 3,000 feet, a direction linked to Vallabhbhai's heart. But at 6 p.m. the Maharaja of Jodhpur, who had a flying licence, pointed out to Patel that one engine had stopped. The radio died, the aircraft started losing height, the terrain into which it was slipping was hilly, and Manibehn, her heart beating fast, thought that the end had come.

What emotions passed through Vallabhbhai is not known. He appeared "unruffled and unmoved"²⁷ and said afterwards that he had "sat through a variety entertainment",²⁸ but it is probable that the thought of death in a crash entered his mind. Thirty miles north of Jaipur the pilot decided on a forced landing. The passengers were told that the door through which they had entered the plane might jam on landing and that they should use the emergency exit, which was in the roof, to get out as quickly as they could, as it was possible that the fuel tanks would catch fire. The emergency exit was not wide, but the Maharaja was, and the Sardar laughed loudly when Shankar said that the Maharaja should leave last: "If his figure got stuck in the exit, there would be no chance of anyone else getting through".²⁹ At 6.20 p.m. the pilot asked everyone to make sure that their seat belts were tightened fast. Five minutes later he had landed the machine perfectly on a riverbed. There was no fire, the door did not jam, and there was no need to climb out through the roof.

A shepherd approached the plane and said, in answer to queries, that they were near the village of Shahpur. Then he left and returned with three other shepherds. More villagers arrived. Milk, water and charpoys appeared. Two wrestlers gave a demonstration of their skills. The Maharaja and the radio officer marched off to find the nearest road, spread word of Vallabhbhai's safety and look for some transport. They returned after passing on their news to some villagers on a road but found no vehicle other than a cart with a thin and stubborn horse. The sun having gone down, flares were lit. After a couple of hours, Patel and his companions walked half a mile over cultivated fields and stopped in an open barren patch not far from the road. The first non-villager to reach the spot

was an official, K. B. Lall, who was in the vicinity and had heard that a plane carrying Vallabhbhai had landed in Shahpur. Lall brought his car and a van he had commandeered, an All India Radio vehicle that was proceeding to Jaipur to cover Patel's visit. Later he recorded:

*The Sardar was sitting on a chair dismantled from the plane, unperturbed but perhaps a little bored. He smiled on seeing me but did not encourage any discussion on the accident. There was no question as to who was to blame. He had no thought of the shock or trouble he had suffered. His mind was set on Jaipur.... When I requested him to get into the car, he asked: "What about you? What about the members of your party? And what about the members of my party, more especially what about the Maharaja who is with me?"*³⁰

It was nearly 11 p.m. when Vallabhbhai and his party reached Jaipur and relieved their hosts, who, like everyone else in India, had assumed that Patel's plane had crashed. At 8.30 p.m. Jawaharlal had summoned Menon, who had preceded the Sardar to Jaipur, back to Delhi. Nehru's nervous pacing was interrupted after 11 p.m. by a call from Jaipur. After Shankar had informed the Prime Minister that all was well, Vallabhbhai joked with Jawaharlal about what had happened. Menon, who flew back to Jaipur the next morning and reported to the Sardar, was asked by him: "Why did you fly to Delhi? Don't you know that nothing will happen to me?" So saying Vallabhbhai embraced Menon, who, in his own words, "could not have been more overcome with emotion".³¹ A large crowd met Vallabhbhai at Palam when he returned to Delhi on March 31. When he entered the parliament chamber later that day the legislators rose to their feet, thumped tables and raised deafening cries for his long life. The cheering continued for three full minutes and stopped only when the Sardar signalled with an upraised hand that it was enough. But he had been deeply moved. He spoke to the House in a broken voice:

*The demonstration of love and affection which I have seen today will have an abiding place in my memory. The three or four hours which I spent on the riverbed were filled with thoughts of the anxiety caused to my countrymen.*³²

The MPs invited him a week later to an evening party on the lawns of Council Hall and asked Nehru to give him, on their behalf, a replica of the Dove in which he had landed on the riverbed. It was a token, they said, of their thankfulness to Providence and of their affection.

Vallabhbhai was once more greatly stirred. But he announced that he would forward the gift to the RIAF.

It was to inaugurate the Greater Rajasthan Union that Patel had gone to Jaipur. The Union had come about in three stages. First, nine States including Kotah, Bundi and Dungarpur came together in a Rajasthan Union. In the next stage the Union was joined by Udaipur, whose dynasty went back to 734 AD and included the legendary Rana Pratap. Then, on March 30, 1949, four major Rajput States – Jaipur, Jodhpur, Bikaner and Jaisalmer – merged with it and Greater Rajasthan was formed. The large Union became larger still in May when the Matsya grouping, formed a year earlier out of Alwar, Bharatpur, Dholpur and Karauli, was added to it. The Maharaja of Jaipur became Greater Rajasthan's Rajpramukh and the city of Jaipur its capital, but in view of the gallant history of the Udaipur line, its ruler was styled Maharajpramukh and assured that on all ceremonial occasions the Maharaja of Jaipur would voluntarily yield precedence to him.

* * *

Many an utterance of the Sardar's recalled the Mahatma. He termed the assassination "an everlasting blot"³³ that proved "our unfitness".³⁴ "We can never forget or forgive ourselves," he said in Benares in November 1948, "that it was one of our own misguided young men who did it."³⁵ He added: "I was Gandhiji's obedient soldier. His tapasya brought us freedom. I followed him because our convictions tallied."³⁶ Three months later Vallabhbhai said that the picture of Gandhi "plying his charkha at their last meeting" was "always before my vision now".³⁷ And on August 15, 1949 the Sardar's independence day message referred to "the balance and poise we all exhibited under [Gandhiji's] magic spell", noted recent bickerings among Congressmen – a "descent from those heights" – and added: "Only one thought comes to my mind: 'Bapu, you should have been living at this hour.'"³⁸ Nine months later he again spoke of the "great tragedy for which we must perpetually hang our heads in shame".³⁹

If the Mahatma's assassin was "one of us" to Patel, the RSS men were also "our brethren".⁴⁰ While criticizing "the secret methods" of the RSS⁴¹ and declaring that the "raising of [a private] army inside India could not be permitted",⁴² he asked its members to join Congress.⁴³ To Nehru, however, the RSS cadres were far from being "our brethren". Two months before Vallabhbhai uttered the words we have quoted, Nehru had written to him:

The RSS have a definite ideology which is entirely opposed to that of the Government and the Congress. They definitely oppose the idea

*of a secular state... If at this juncture we remove the ban on the RSS and continue it on other groups, this will be widely interpreted as our encouraging certain fascist elements in India.*⁴⁴

Though seldom talking of secularism, Patel was no proponent of Hindu rule. In February 1949 he spoke of "Hindu Raj" as "that mad idea".⁴⁵ Ten weeks earlier he had said that "every loyal Muslim must be treated as a brother".⁴⁶ The 1947 massacres of Muslims and non-Muslims were to him "the blackest chapter in the history of India".⁴⁷ Yet Vallabhbhai was impressed by the discipline and numbers in the RSS and conscious that it had saved numerous Hindu and Sikh lives during the 1947 killings.⁴⁸ While less inclined to look at the RSS's positive side, Jawaharlal agreed with the Sardar that the ban on it and the detention without trial of thousands of its members could not continue indefinitely. In July 1949, after Golwalkar, the RSS chief, accepted the Sardar's conditions, he and the other RSS detenus were released and the ban on the body lifted. The conditions were that the RSS should adopt a written and published constitution, restrict itself to culture, forswear violence and secrecy, profess loyalty to India's flag and constitution and provide for a democratic organization.⁴⁹

Hindus leaving East Pakistan for India greatly exceeded Muslims entering East Pakistan from India and choked West Bengal's economy. At Congress's December 1948 session in Jaipur, Vallabhbhai asked Pakistan to do one of two things: "either take back and resettle the refugees or cede sufficient territory contiguous to West Bengal".⁵⁰ Earlier, in a letter to Nehru, Patel had referred to a third solution: "a clear indication to the Pakistan Government that if this immigration continues we would have no alternative left except to send out Muslims in equal numbers."⁵¹ Jawaharlal cited the objections to the last proposal. "It would create communal trouble all over India. Every Muslim in India would feel an alien and in effect we would have established a Hindu State.... Then again, how would one pick out Muslims, who are undoubtedly citizens of India, to be sent to East Bengal?... Neither international nor domestic law could justify this pushing out of our own citizens."⁵²

The Sardar accepted Nehru's reasoning and yielded his own knee-jerk reaction. He also gave up the territorial demand and explored the alternative of persuading Pakistan to take back the refugees: he would give Hindu-Muslim compatibility a trial in both India and East Pakistan. It was a change from his 1947 position and reflected a conscious decision not to embarrass Nehru. Dissatisfaction in the party and the Cabinet with Jawaharlal's reaction to the influx had given Vallabhbhai an opportunity to strengthen himself against Nehru but he rejected it, and he rejected as well an offer of the Prime Ministership that Jawaharlal made to him at the end of February 1950.

Upset at the grumbling against him, Nehru had contemplated resigning his office and touring East Bengal the way Gandhi had done. After referring, in a letter to Patel, to "a feeling that I have largely exhausted my utility in New Delhi", Nehru had added: "From every point of view, my proposal appears to be justified.... You will be there to guide them in any event."⁵³

It took Vallabhbhai not a minute to turn down Jawaharlal's proposal. Apart from the fact that he lacked the physical strength for the Prime Ministership – he had spat blood after making a speech in Parliament in February –, Nehru's leadership, with all its deficiencies and its capacity to vex him personally, seemed to be what India needed. Expressing his unwillingness to accept the burden, Patel reiterated his support to Nehru, who dropped his idea as quickly as he had mentioned it. He and the Sardar agreed that Liaquat Ali Khan, the Pakistani Premier, should be urged to come to Delhi for talks. There was "no other peaceful alternative".⁵⁴ Vallabhbhai and Nehru had considered the non-peaceful alternative and had not dismissed it for all time. But they would give negotiation a chance.

Arriving early in April, Liaquat stayed a week. After several discussions with Jawaharlal he asked to meet Patel. The Sardar had not been anxious to talk with him: about 250,000 Hindus had left East Pakistan for West Bengal in the previous three months.⁵⁵ However, Nehru pressed Vallabhbhai, who lunched with Liaquat on April 5 and told him: "Jawaharlal is exerting night and day for Muslim rights. I lie awake at night worrying that what happened to Gandhiji might happen to him."⁵⁶ When Azad proposed that both Bengals should have ministers for minority affairs, Liaquat replied that the principle should be accepted for the two countries and not just for the two Bengals. The Sardar firmly rejected the idea:

*I am quite sure that the party will not accept it and the country will not swallow this bitter pill. We have conceded one Pakistan; that is more than enough.*⁵⁷

But a Pact was signed and Vallabhbhai gave it his support. The two governments agreed to ensure equality of citizenship to Hindus and Muslims alike, constitute minority commissions and commissions to inquire into riots, and place minority representatives in the governments of the two Bengals and Assam. Alleging appeasement, Shyama Prasad Mookerjee and another Minister from West Bengal, K. C. Neogy, left the Indian Cabinet. Large crowds cheered Mookerjee in West Bengal.

"At this moment," to quote Nehru's biographer, "it was Patel who stole the scene."⁵⁸ To MPs, the *Hindustan Times* noted, he made "one

of the most moving appeals they had ever heard.’⁵⁹ Pledging “his whole strength and energy to making a success of the Agreement and vindicating the stand of the Prime Minister”. Vallabhbhai called upon every member, in the name of patriotism, to do likewise.⁶⁰ The appeal to MPs was followed by a five-day visit to Calcutta, made at Nehru’s request*, where the Sardar urged a fair trial for the Pact. He met editors, the West Bengal Cabinet, the PCC executive, MLAs, Hindu Mahasabha leaders, Muslim Congressmen, students, refugees, an Assamese delegation....

Risking damage to his ebbing health, Vallabhbhai had fought Nehru’s battle and, to quote Jawaharlal’s biographer again, “secured support for the agreement from quarters which refused to listen to Nehru”.⁶² Some Congressmen from East Bengal were persuaded to return there. The West Bengal Press became more open to the Pact. Broadcasting from Calcutta, the Sardar spoke of Liaquat Ali’s “earnestness and visible sincerity”, of “the background of previous association” that the existing generation in both India and Pakistan still had, which succeeding generations would lack, and of the “ugly and deplorable incidents on our side” which had “weakened our position”. Assuring all-India help for refugees, he asked them not to rule out returning to East Bengal and urged West Bengal to “mark time and put Pakistan on the spot”.⁶³ “Vallabhbhai has been a brick during these days,” remarked Nehru.⁶⁴

By August a hundred thousand Hindus had returned to East Bengal. There was a flow of Muslims back to West Bengal. *Dawn*, founded by Jinnah and moved from Delhi to Karachi, suddenly sounded friendlier to India. An Indo-Pak trade agreement was signed. Sadly, the new mood did not last long. But Patel had revealed his character. For all his uninhibited remarks at other times, he had been soldierly in the testing hour, protecting his colleague and keeping his last word to the Mahatma. Though he fought to win his political combats, his iron hand stopped in mid-air if the nation’s good, or a solemn promise, was threatened.

* * *

With Vallabhbhai’s full support – and, let us note, with the complete agreement of Nehru and the Mahatma –, Congress had facilitated the entry into the Constituent Assembly of several jurists with a non-Congress or even anti-Congress past. The party had its own legal experts, led by K. M. Munshi, and a host of brilliant lawyers, but it sensibly provided a part in constitution-making to outsiders like

* According to Shankar, Jawaharlal had said to Patel that he (Nehru) would be stoned if he went to Calcutta.⁶¹

Ambedkar, M. R. Jayakar, Alladi Krishnaswami Aiyar, Gopalaswami Ayyangar, H. N. Kunzru, Shyama Prasad Mookerjee, K.T. Shah and Frank Anthony, who were all members of the Constituent Assembly, and to B. N. Rau, adviser to the Assembly's President, Rajendra Prasad. While the roles of Prasad, Ambedkar, the chairman of the Drafting Committee, and Rau, who prepared the early drafts, were crucial, Patel and Jawaharlal also made significant contributions as leaders of the House and chairmen of key committees.

Minorities, fundamental rights and provincial constitutions were the concerns of the committees or sub-committees that Vallabhbhai chaired. His predilection for a strong centre influenced Articles 356 and 354, which enabled the Union President to take over the administration of a State, as a province was later called, and required the Centre to ensure that States were run on constitutional lines. Linking High Courts to the Supreme Court and freeing them from the interference of provincial governments were other provisions proposed, with Patel's support, by the provincial constitutions sub-committee and accepted by the Assembly. The strong centre envisaged by Vallabhbhai did not, however, include an all-powerful Prime Minister, and when the Union Powers Committee, chaired by Nehru, proposed that the President of India be elected solely by the central legislature, the Sardar disagreed. Thereafter the Nehru and Patel committees met together and agreed that the central and provincial legislatures should jointly elect the President, with weightage in voting for central legislators.

Differences over fundamental rights were harder to bridge. Ridiculing the view that "there should be no restrictions on the Press, the lathi or the bullet",⁶⁵ Vallabhbhai wanted the citizen's rights of speech and action to be balanced by society's rights of order and security. In debate at any rate Nehru seemed a stronger advocate of individual rights but not of the right to own land. The peasant in Patel made him a stubborn foe of any idea of dispossessing landholders of their land without compensation. The Congress party and the Assembly could not easily decide whether or not the constitution should assure the right to compensation or allow the citizen to complain to a court that he was not being fairly compensated. Vallabhbhai was clear that the answers had to be yes. Expropriation without compensation was to him "theft" and "dacoity".⁶⁶ After long negotiations and debate, his point of view, though not his preferred draft, was accepted, but a series of amendments introduced following his death ate away the right to property.

Patel's promise to the Princes that the privy purses for which they had surrendered their States would be embedded in the Constitution was fulfilled. Jawaharlal had asked whether it was proper to impose an obligation on all future governments but the Sardar was clear that

“failure to do so would be a breach of faith”.⁶⁷ Eventually Nehru went along with the Sardar, whose guarantees were given constitutional recognition in Article 267A. Earlier Vallabhbhai had told the Constituent Assembly that the total liability for privy purses would not exceed Rs four crore a year and added:

*The privy purse settlements are in the nature of consideration for the surrender by the rulers of all their ruling powers and also for the dissolution of their States as separate units.... Need we cavil at the small – I purposely use the word small – price we have paid for the bloodless revolution which has affected the destinies of millions of our people?*⁶⁸

A later Government and Parliament annulled the word of the Constituent Assembly.

Patel's intervention also proved necessary for the acceptance of two Articles relating to the Services. One, Article 311, made it difficult for politicians to punish officials. The other, Article 314, guaranteed the terms and privileges of members of the Indian Civil Service in accordance with an assurance that Vallabhbhai had given shortly before independence. Both provisions attracted criticism. Many members of the Assembly had been imprisoned during the freedom struggle by the officials whom the Article would protect. Ananthasayanam Ayyangar, a future Speaker of the Lok Sabha, said of Article 314: “This is an extraordinary guarantee.... This guarantee asks us to forget that these persons who are still in the service – 400 of them – committed excesses.”⁶⁹

The Sardar hammered Ayyangar and in the process spelt out his idea of the Minister-Secretary relationship:

I am distressed that a senior member like Mr Ayyangar considers and expresses the opinion that the members of the [Indian Civil Service] are enemies of our country. If that is so, it is his business to move a resolution to dispense with them and run the administration in a vacuum.

I wish to record in this House that if during the last two or three years most of the members of the Services had not behaved patriotically and with loyalty, the Union would have collapsed.

If you have done with it and decide not to have this Service, I will take the Service with me and go. They will earn their living. They are capable people.

Today my Secretary can write a note opposed to my views. I have given that freedom to all my Secretaries. I have told them: “If you do not give your honest opinion, then please you had better go.”

*Do not take a lathi and say: "We are a supreme Parliament." Have you supremacy to go back on your word?*⁷⁰

All opposition collapsed after this. His stout defence of the men of the ICS and his role in the founding of its successor agency, the Indian Administrative Service, and of the Indian Police Service, earned him the title of the civilians' "patron saint".⁷¹ The civilians' industry, ability and, in some cases, independence, had impressed Vallabhbhai, but he also saw the all-India services as a protection against separatism: they gave the Centre a lever against the provinces. The foundation for his relationship with the services was laid early in 1947, when he called over 30 senior officials to 1 Aurangzeb Road and invited them to join him and his colleagues in serving the country.⁷² The gesture moved the officials and removed their fears.

In subsequent years, the civilians working with the Sardar found that he listened, was not omniscient, said little, said it clearly, decided quickly, delegated freely, inserted no second thoughts and took responsibility. In addition he was accessible to his officials and often in direct touch with them. He was, in short, the civil servant's ideal Minister.⁷³ "Nehru too had winning ways," Iengar would recall. "He would come to your room and put his arm around you. But Patel gave trust."⁷⁴ Yet he managed, while enlisting the officials, to retain his hold over their natural adversary, the party, a notable feat. If Vallabhbhai controlled the party and the services, Jawaharlal enjoyed the confidence of the masses and the intelligentsia – in broad terms, this was the distribution of influence between 1947 and 1950.*

His chance, as chairman of the Advisory Committee on minorities, to initiate the abolition of communal electorates and communal quotas in legislatures gave Vallabhbhai particular satisfaction. Separate electorates had very few votaries left: the provision was widely seen as having facilitated, if not created, Pakistan. The minorities panel proposed an end to separate electorates soon after it began its labours, a decision fully backed by the representatives of the minorities on the panel. But reserved seats in legislatures were less easily given up. The reiteration of Congress's commitment to reserved seats for the Scheduled Castes and Tribes encouraged other groups and communities to think that quotas might be conceded for them as well. The only additional quota that Patel was prepared to accept was for Sikh Scheduled Castes, and that too only because of the unhappiness and suffering that partition had brought to Sikhs generally. Vallabhbhai spoke of his regret that "for a mess of pottage"⁷⁶ Sikh

* In an unprecedented and unrepeatable gesture, over 1,500 officers met in New Delhi on December 16, 1950 to mourn Patel's death, which had taken place the previous day, and pledged their "complete loyalty and unremitting zeal" in India's service.⁷⁵

leaders were willing to claim untouchability in their community. But he did not oppose their plea.

With the other minorities – Muslims, Parsis, (non-scheduled) Sikhs, Anglo-Indians and Christians –, Patel took the line that a community that with one voice demanded a quota of seats might obtain it, but it would lose goodwill. After expressing this view, Vallabhbhai talked privately and separately with representatives of the different groups, starting with the smaller ones. One after the other, the Christians, the Parsis and the Anglo-Indians agreed to trust that they would receive representation without reserved seats. To allay an anxiety that Anglo-Indians might fail to secure elected representation, the Sardar accepted a proposal to empower the President and the Governors to nominate Anglo-Indian legislators. The Sikhs, too, were persuaded.

Patel had left the Muslims to the last. Though reconciled to an end to a separate Muslims electorate, their leaders seemed to favour a quota of Muslim seats. Azad took time to make up his mind. In the end he privately advised Muslim members not to press for reservation.⁷⁷ The Sardar, meanwhile, had won over Begum Aizaz Rasul of the U.P., “once an energetic member of the Muslim League”,⁷⁸ to the idea of giving up reservation. Although some Muslim members of the Assembly continued to fight for reservation, a majority yielded. On May 11, 1949 the Advisory Committee carried by 58 votes to 3 a resolution moved by H.C. Mookerjee, a Christian, that there should be no reservation except for Scheduled Castes and Tribes.

Two weeks later Vallabhbhai moved a similar resolution in the Assembly. Azad did not speak when it was debated and Saadullah, a non-Congress Muslim from Assam, claimed that the Maulana was “neutral” over reservation. Answering that Azad would “have spoken up if he had felt that abolition was harmful”, Patel added:

I want the consent of all minorities to change the course of history.... Whatever may be the credit for having won a Muslim homeland, please do not forget what the poor Muslims have suffered.... I respectfully appeal to believers in the two-nation theory to go and enjoy the fruits of their freedom and leave us here in peace.⁷⁹

Asking the Sikhs to “take control of the country and run it”, Vallabhbhai put a plain question to those opposing reservation for the Scheduled Castes: “Have any of you gone and stayed for an hour in a scavenger’s home?”⁸⁰ After the Assembly had accepted Patel’s resolution, Mahavir Tyagi said on the floor: “Now communal consolidation too has been achieved.”⁸¹ Vallabhbhai’s concluding sentence had contained a similar sentiment:

*Now with the grace of God and with the blessings of the Almighty, we are laying the foundation of a true secular democratic state where everybody has an equal chance and an equal opportunity.*⁸²

The Constitution of the Republic of India was adopted on November 26, 1949. After Prasad, as the Assembly's President, signed it, Patel and Nehru walked arm in arm up to the chair and smilingly shook hands with Prasad. Ambedkar followed them and repeated the act. Then the three, Nehru, the Sardar and Ambedkar, came down the aisle together. The nation had crossed a proud milestone.

* * *

A Republic succeeded the Dominion of India on January 26, 1950, and a President replaced the Governor-General. Jawaharlal had wanted C.R. to continue as first citizen with a new designation. In June 1949 he casually mentioned this thought to Vallabhbhai, who did not demur. C.R. was an old comrade who as Governor-General had backed Patel on Hyderabad and on incorporating the Privy Purses and the right to property in the Constitution. Vallabhbhai's 1942 conflict with C.R. was a forgotten episode: what mattered now was his colleague's ability and usefulness, and about these there was no doubt in Patel's mind. Moreover, their views on economic policy coincided. True, Nehru and Rajaji had formed a close relationship, with Jawaharlal opening out to C.R. and leaning on his advice, and the two held similar views on the Hindu-Muslim question. These views were a butt of Vallabhbhai's cracks: he would call Nehru "Congress's only nationalist Muslim"* (a barb aimed at Azad as well) and on one occasion in the Governor-General's mansion he described C.R., to the latter's son Narasimhan, as "half a Muslim".⁸³ Such remarks are an accurate indication of Patel's style of humour but wholly misleading as far as his attitude to Nehru or C.R. was concerned. All they signalled was Vallabhbhai's freedom in private banter.

More than willing, all in all, to see C.R. continue, Patel changed his mind for two reasons. One was the party's desire to make Prasad the President. Most members of the Constituent Assembly, which gave itself the power of choosing the President, were Quit India graduates and could not forget, even if Vallabhbhai and Nehru could, that in 1942 – when Prasad had gone to prison with them – C.R. was proposing accommodation with the Raj and the League. Moreover, even if Prasad lacked C.R.'s effervescence, he was as able as his South Indian colleague and had chaired the Assembly with dignified wisdom. The

* To Rajendra Prasad, Feb., 1950. See V. Choudhary, *Rashtrapati Bhavan Ki Diary*, Delhi, 1960, p.72.

party's preference did not conflict with that of Patel, who was aware that he and Prasad thought as one on most matters.

Yet despite his personal preference and the party's, Vallabhbhai, if approached properly, would have assisted Nehru in facilitating C.R.'s election. And had Nehru and Patel together urged him to stand aside, Prasad might have agreed. Jawaharlal's impatience and pride, the latter skilfully exploited by Satyanarayan Sinha, the Government's Chief Whip, ruled out such a solution. Nehru wanted an agreement on C.R.'s election before the first week of October, when he was to proceed abroad. For much of September, however, Vallabhbhai was in Bombay, taking a break and consulting physicians. Sinha, who was keen on Prasad's elevation, spoke to Nehru on September 10 of talk among Assembly members that the P.M. would not be able, without Patel's help, to install Rajaji.⁸⁴ Jawaharlal would have gained his purpose, and not lost his dignity, if he had phoned Vallabhbhai with Sinha's message, admitted its truth and sought the Sardar's help. He chose instead to show Sinha what he could do on his own. At once he sent a letter to Prasad on the need to choose a President: "I am told that rumours are afloat and some members of the CA are more or less canvassing. I feel this must be ended." Though he had not talked with Vallabhbhai on the subject, apart from that perfunctory conversation three months earlier, Jawaharlal added:

*I have discussed this matter with Vallabhbhai and we felt that the safest and best course was to allow present arrangements to continue... that is that Rajaji might continue as President.... Of course you would be a very welcome choice as President but that would involve a change and consequent rearrangements.... I hope you agree. In this matter it would of course be fitting for you to suggest this, rather than for any other person.*⁸⁵

But Prasad had other ideas and refused to yield except on terms acutely embarrassing to Nehru: "I am required," he replied, "to accept and act upon a decision which has been taken without even the courtesy of consultation, although it concerned me intimately. I am deprived of the chance of flattering myself with the thought that I have not been judged by you and rejected." After adding that he would resign from the Assembly "and make myself free to carry out the decision that which you have taken", Prasad asked to be excused for the feeling that he "deserved a more decent exit".⁸⁶

Both Prasad and Nehru turned at this point to Vallabhbhai in Bombay, Prasad asking for justice and Nehru for succour, but the latter's word to the Sardar – "it is for you to deal with the situation now"⁸⁷ – was too late. Moreover, though Nehru admitted to Prasad that his September 10 letter had been sent "without any reference to

Vallabhbhai or consultation with him", ⁸⁸ he did not apologize to the Sardar. That he had been taken for granted gave Vallabhbhai a motive for scoring a point against Jawaharlal, and Nehru's slip, Prasad's stand and the party's sentiment combined to give him the opportunity. Advising Prasad, who phoned him on the night of September 13, not to desist from the course he had adopted, ⁸⁹ Patel wrote to Nehru that the position was "very complicated" and had to be "dealt with very tactfully and cautiously". ⁹⁰

When, at the end of September, Vallabhbhai returned to Delhi, he found Nehru pressing for a party meeting for nominating C.R. Despite Patel's warning that the MPs were in no mood to oblige him, Nehru convened them on the evening of October 5 – he was flying to London the next morning – and proposed Rajaji's name. The PM's speech was vociferously interrupted. Realizing, to his shock, that his proposition was likely to be rejected, Jawaharlal turned to Vallabhbhai for support but the Sardar declined to offer it. Nehru sat down and heard bitter words against the proposal from one MP after another. Finally, Vallabhbhai took the floor, admonished the MPs for their unbecoming tone towards Nehru, assured them that Jawaharlal would not disregard their views and suggested that a decision on C.R. or Prasad be deferred until Nehru's return.

That night Nehru informed Vallabhbhai through a handwritten letter that he would resign after his trip: he felt, he said, that his leadership had been rejected. He would advise the Governor-General, Nehru had apparently added, to call upon the Sardar to assume the leadership. ⁹¹ This was about the last thing Vallabhbhai wanted. Nehru had been helped to see that his wish was not law, and that contented Patel. A break with Jawaharlal was not on his agenda. He had refrained from disputing Nehru's preference for C.R., adopting instead a strategy of demonstrating the party's sentiment. Seeing Jawaharlal off the following morning, Vallabhbhai asked him to dismiss the thought of leaving office and to travel through the U.K. and the U.S.A. as if nothing had happened. ⁹²

This Nehru did, and he did not talk of quitting when, five weeks later, he returned to New Delhi, but he renewed his attempt to secure Prasad's withdrawal, offering him first the chairmanship of a new Planning Commission and then, when it was clear that Prasad was not biting, the Presidentship of Congress. A fear that Prasad might turn meek again and yield entered Patel's heart. He told D.P. Mishra: "*Agar dulha paalki chhod kar bhaag na jaaye to shaadi nakki.*" ("Provided the bridegroom does not desert the palanquin, the marriage is assured.") ⁹³ "But the bridegroom," in Mishra's words, "was firmly sitting in the palanquin and the marriage party need not have been anxious." ⁹⁴ Rejecting Nehru's alternatives, Prasad told him that his

friends would allege "dictation" and "betrayal" if he withdrew, whereupon C.R. announced his retirement.⁹⁵

Earlier, Vallabhbhai had volunteered to C.R.: "Jawaharlal has spoilt everything. I wanted to do it tactfully. He has rushed the matter."⁹⁶ Though Patel's stand killed his prospects, Rajaji recognized that the Sardar had thrown his weight behind Prasad only after Nehru had succumbed to Sinha's bait. Unwilling to harbour resentment against Vallabhbhai, C.R. spoke before leaving Delhi of the "universal confidence" the Sardar commanded.⁹⁷ Manibehn noticed moisture in her father's eyes, and in C.R.'s, when the two embraced before the retiring Governor-General's departure for Madras on January 27.⁹⁸ At seven a.m. the previous day, Prasad, his wife and his sister had called at 1 Aurangzeb Road and gone thereafter, with Vallabhbhai and Manibehn, to Rajghat. Later that morning the Republic was proclaimed and Prasad sworn in. The adroit Patel had won on all sides and a rash Nehru had lost. But Vallabhbhai was 74 and ill, and Jawaharlal a fit 60.

* * *

The Republic remained in the Commonwealth, India accepting the English monarch as "the symbolic head" of "the free association of independent members". The formula was chiselled into shape in April 1949 at a Commonwealth Prime Ministers Conference in London. Jawaharlal played a major role in its evolution but the support and suggestions that Vallabhbhai had cabled during the London consultations were also of help. While fully agreeing that recognition of the King as the Commonwealth's symbolic head would "in no sense" be "derogatory to our Republic's sovereign status", Patel cautioned Nehru against anything "suggestive of an inferior class of membership for us and a superior one for others".⁹⁹ The latter message was his reaction to a proposal that the allegiance to the crown of the rest of the Commonwealth should be reiterated by the London conference. Following the Sardar's message this reiteration was modified, and the change enabled Vallabhbhai to feel that "our membership would be full and equal".¹⁰⁰

There was irony, of course, in Nehru, the erstwhile foe of any link with the Commonwealth, espousing India's continuance in it. As for Patel, we know that even in the struggle years he was ready – along with the Mahatma, Prasad and C.R. – to envisage partnership with Britain and the Commonwealth. But for Vallabhbhai's support, Nehru's post-independence wish to stay in the Commonwealth would have been thwarted by nationalist opposition in India. "I am certain," Mountbatten wrote to Patel, "that history will give you great credit for the strong line you took in favour of retaining the link with the

Commonwealth.”¹⁰¹ Though Vallabhbhai’s had undoubtedly been a firm line, he refused to acknowledge it in black and white. All he said in his reply to Mountbatten was: “I myself am quite content to leave the appraisal of my work for the country to future historians rather than contemporary public opinion.”¹⁰² Achieving a result was always more important to him than stating his opinions.

As an Arab correspondent discovered in October 1948, it was not easy to draw Patel out on foreign affairs.

*Q.: What is your opinion towards Count Bernadotte’s plan for Palestine? A.: No, I will say nothing about Palestine. Q.: Not even your own opinion? Your Excellency knows that Palestine is the most important question for the Arab world. A.: There is no question of expressing any personal opinion in the matter. I am not in charge of the Ministry of External Affairs.*¹⁰³

But in Cabinet and committee, in communications with Nehru and sometimes in public Vallabhbhai expressed himself on India’s relations with other nations. On rare occasions he played a more active role, as when India needed grain from the U.S.A.

*Loy Henderson was the U.S. Ambassador and Sardar invited him to a quiet and exclusive lunch. Sardar’s proposal was that Henderson might persuade his Government to grant India a loan to finance the import of two million tons of wheat....Sardar had secured Pandit Nehru’s concurrence and Loy Henderson fell in with his wishes. The U.S. Administration accepted the proposal.*¹⁰⁴

Patel’s seeming indifference to foreign affairs concealed prescience:

*In 1950 the problem of Goa was being discussed in the Foreign Affairs Committee.... The discussion went on for two hours. Sardar Patel seemed to take no interest. He kept his eyes closed for most of the time and seemed half asleep. Suddenly he woke up and said, “Shall we go in? It is two hours’ work.” Nehru resisted this suggestion vehemently....Sardar Patel did not press his point but retired sphinx-like into silence.*¹⁰⁵

The observer of this scene, K. P. S. Menon, also records that when, twelve years later, India under Nehru did enter Goa, “it turned out to be little more than two hours’ work”.¹⁰⁶

The Sardar's fears for Tibet were evident in the summer of 1949, well before the Communists gained full control over China.

Patel to Nehru, 4.6.49: *We have to strengthen our position in Sikkim as well as in Tibet. The farther we keep away the Communist forces, the better. Tibet has long been detached from China. I anticipate that as soon as the Communists have established themselves in the rest of China, they will try to destroy its autonomous existence. You have to consider carefully your policy towards Tibet in such circumstances and prepare from now for that eventuality.*¹⁰⁷

The comment was sparked by a letter from Attlee to Nehru about the difficulties posed to Hong Kong by Mao's rise. The Sardar added:

*As regards Attlee's letter to you, if I may suggest, you might send the draft reply to me before despatching it to London. It is possible I may be able to offer some useful suggestions... The problem is difficult. On the one side we have undoubtedly Hong Kong's imperialistic history. On the other hand we have to reckon with the growing Communist menace in China.*¹⁰⁸

Though Vallabhbhai was eager to share in the shaping of India's China policy, Nehru did not think he needed help. He also saw things differently and ignored Patel's remarks on Tibet.

Nehru to Patel, 5.6.49: *The reply to Attlee about Hong Kong has already been sent.... I shall make sure it is being sent to you.... Meanwhile, the Communists in China are behaving very correctly towards the foreigners and even business is continuing to some extent.*¹⁰⁹

Six months later the two differed on the timing of India's recognition of China's new Government.

Patel to Nehru, 6.12.49: *It seems your intention is to recognize China soon after the U.N. session ends, even if it means that others are not ready by then or prepared to do so. My own feeling is that we do not stand to gain anything by giving a lead....*

*In case, however, you feel that we must recognize China earlier than others, I feel that we might have a discussion in the Cabinet.*¹¹⁰

Nehru to Patel, 6.12.49: *Our advisers are of opinion that it would be definitely harmful to recognize... after the Commonwealth have done so. It would mean that we have no policy of our own, but follow the dictates of other countries.*

*If you like, I shall put it up before the Cabinet. But the date [of recognition] will have to be left open.*¹¹¹

North Korea invaded South Korea in June 1950. India supported a UN resolution calling for assistance to South Korea and asking North Korea to withdraw but Patel found the Foreign Ministry's expression of India's dislike of aggression unnecessarily apologetic.¹¹² Thereafter, while Nehru strove to end the war in Korea as well as the distrust between America and Mao's China, the Sardar focussed on China's moves in Tibet, one a dove trailing messages of peace in the skies of the world, the other India's watchman staring at the northern frontier.

This frontier had been delineated in agreements that the British had entered into with Tibet, which had functioned for decades as a separate entity, its people united in their devotion to their spiritual-cum-temporal ruler. The reigning Dalai Lama was 15 years old in 1950. Indo-Tibetan trade was regulated by a treaty between New Delhi and Lhasa, where India enjoyed a special diplomatic status. Tibet's expanse, altitude and autonomy gave India a strong sense of safety in the north. That China claimed rights over Tibet was known but for long years China had seemed divided and preoccupied, and apparently both unwilling and unable to exercise more than a nominal suzerainty. In 1949, however, China acquired a strong and assertive leadership, and the Sardar grew anxious.

An India-based Briton, a General, had said two years earlier that "rather than see a Chinese occupation of Tibet, India should be prepared to occupy the plateau itself."¹¹³ This was not in Vallabhbhai's mind; his aim was only to hinder Peking's occupation of Tibet, and he had no conscientious objection to taking help, if offered, from countries like the U.K. and the U.S.A. Neither the end nor the means were acceptable to Nehru, who was trying in 1950 to build a relationship with Mao Tse-tung and Chou En-lai and also to lay bridges between Peking and the Western powers. Unwilling to look at China's activities in Tibet, or at the danger to the rights that India had enjoyed there, Jawaharlal was satisfied with a note from Peking in August 1950 stating that it would "liberate" Tibet by "peaceful and friendly" means.¹¹⁴

The Chinese "listen to us", Nehru complacently wrote in the middle of September 1950¹¹⁵ to his sister Vijayalakshmi Pandit, the Ambassador to Washington. He ascribed this fortunate state of affairs to three things: the proof of independence he had given in his American tour ten months earlier; India's championing of China's case in the UN; and the skill of the Ambassador to Peking, K. M. Panikkar, who, Nehru noted, "gets on very well with the Chinese Government".¹¹⁶ A month later Peking announced military action to "liberate" Tibet. To this India's response was "an unsigned and unofficial" note handed by

Panikkar to the Chinese Foreign Office expressing "regret and surprise".¹¹⁷ The country thought to be "listening to us" charged that the feeble protest was "affected by foreign influences hostile to China in Tibet".¹¹⁸ Even this did not jolt Jawaharlal, who insisted that "friendly relations with China" had to be "the cornerstone of our policy".¹¹⁹

The newspapers of October 31, 1950 headlined an appeal from Tibet for India's diplomatic help but also published a statement by Nehru in which he referred to the "unclear picture" of Tibet and asked for an understanding of Chinese and Russian fears, "however unfounded", of intrigue against Communist China from Tibet.¹²⁰ Another item reminded the nation that it was the Sardar's 75th birthday. Less "understanding" than Nehru, Vallabhbhai accused China of "aggression" and spoke of Tibet as "a country" in public utterances in Ahmedabad, where he spent the anniversary.¹²¹ Returning to Delhi, he was heartened to hear C.R., who had joined the Government as Minister without portfolio, attack Nehru's policy in the Cabinet.¹²²

Despite Vallabhbhai's stand, and C.R.'s, Jawaharlal refused to countenance a breach with China and ignored a hint from Henderson that the State Department would help if asked.¹²³ The newspapers of November 4 announced that Tibet had been taken over.¹²⁴ By now Patel had resolved to leave a record of his views on Tibet and China. Before formulating his note he had a discussion with Girja Shankar Bajpai, the Foreign Secretary,¹²⁵ who was as unhappy as Vallabhbhai with India's handling of Tibet and had complained to Nehru that Panikkar had been "influenced more by the Chinese point of view, by Chinese claims, by Chinese maps and by regard for Chinese susceptibilities than by his instructions or by India's interests".¹²⁶

The Sardar's celebrated letter to Nehru on India, Tibet and China was initially drafted by Shankar.* It probably included some points suggested by Bajpai.¹²⁸ But its central thrust was entirely Vallabhbhai's, as was the idea of sending it, and his concern about Tibet was at least 17 months old.

Patel to Nehru, 7.11.50: *I have carefully gone through the correspondence between the External Affairs Ministry and our Ambassador in Peking and through him the Chinese Government.*

The Chinese Government have tried to delude us by professions of peaceful intentions....There is no doubt that during the period covered by this correspondence the Chinese must have been

* "Sardar indicated to me a broad outline of what should be included and what should be emphasised and finally gave me a clear enunciation of what should, in his view, be done. He approved of my draft with some amendments."¹²⁷

concentrating for an onslaught on Tibet. The final action of the Chinese, in my judgment, is little short of perfidy.

The tragedy of it is that the Tibetans put faith in us; they chose to be guided by us; and we have been unable to get them out of the meshes of Chinese diplomacy or Chinese influence.

It is impossible to imagine any sensible person believing in the so-called threat to China from Anglo-American machinations in Tibet. If the Chinese put faith in this, they must have distrusted us so completely as to have taken us as tools or stooges of Anglo-American diplomacy. This feeling, if genuinely entertained by the Chinese in spite of your direct approaches to them, indicates that even though we regard ourselves as friends of China the Chinese do not regard us as their friends.

We had a friendly Tibet which gave us no trouble... We seem to have regarded Tibetan autonomy as extending to independent treaty relationship... The Chinese interpretation of suzerainty seems to be different. We can, therefore, safely assume, that very soon they will disown all the stipulations which Tibet has entered into with us in the past.

The undefined state of the frontier and the existence on our side of a population with affinities to Tibetans or Chinese have all the elements of potential troubles between China and ourselves.

For the first time after centuries, India's defence has to concentrate itself on two fronts simultaneously... In our calculations we shall now have to reckon (apart from Pakistan) with Communist China in the north and the northeast.

The appraisal was followed by a call for

A military and intelligence appreciation of the Chinese threat; a long-term consideration of our defence needs; [a review of] the question of Chinese entry into the U.N.; political and administrative steps... to strengthen our northern and northeastern frontiers; measures of internal security in the border areas; improvement of communications in these areas and with the frontier outposts; and [a strengthening of the] policing and intelligence of frontier posts.

The letter ended with a suggestion that "we meet early and decide on such steps as we might think to be immediately necessary".¹²⁹ No such meeting took place and the letter was not even answered, but Jawaharlal wrote a note on China and Tibet that touched on some of the Sardar's points and sent him a copy:

Note by Nehru, 18.11.50: *I think it may be taken for granted that China will take possession of the whole of Tibet. There is no likelihood whatever of Tibet being able to resist this or stop it. It is equally unlikely that any foreign power can prevent it. We cannot do so.*

I think it is extremely unlikely that we may have to face any real military invasion from the Chinese side.... It is inconceivable that China should divert its forces and its strength across the inhospitable terrain of Tibet and undertake a wild adventure across the Himalayas.... Thus I rule out any major attack on India by China.

We cannot save Tibet.... It may be possible, however, that we might be able to help Tibet retain a large measure of her autonomy.... This can only be done on the diplomatic level.

*In no event should we sponsor Tibet's appeal (in the UN).... Suppose [Tibet's appeal] comes up for discussion. What then? I would suggest that our representative should state our case as moderately as possible....*¹³⁰

Nehru's justification for silence on Tibet was the time-honoured one: condemnation of the aggressor "might well bring greater trouble" to the victim.¹³¹ Nehru the romantic, the internationalist, prescribed a prisonhouse peace to a spirited people, while Patel the realist sadly recorded that India had let down people who "put faith in us". By refusing to look at an option that was available until the spring or summer of 1950, India's leaders shared some responsibility for the helplessness to which Tibet had been reduced and for the risks to India from that helplessness. Ten months before the fall of Tibet, the *London Economist* had pointed out that

*Having maintained complete independence of China since 1912, Tibet has a strong claim to be regarded as an independent state.... But it is for India to take a lead in this matter.... If India decides to support the independence of Tibet as a buffer state between itself and China, Britain and the U.S.A. will do well to extend formal diplomatic recognition to it.*¹³²

Vallabhbhai, who had noted in June 1949 that "Tibet has long been detached from China", would have considered this option but not Nehru. Non-embarrassment of China was the cornerstone of his foreign policy. Time justified Patel's apprehensions that Tibet's autonomy would shrink. The Dalai Lama was forced into exile in 1959. The attack on India that Vallabhbhai feared and Jawaharlal had ruled out took place three years thereafter. Nehru was Prime Minister still but Patel had been dead for twelve years.

The heart attack had changed his day. A stroll within the compound or a drive to the Qutb Minar replaced the energetic morning walk. After lunch he would stretch out and sleep a little, his visits to North Block became shorter, and he wrote few letters by hand. The summers found him repairing to Dehra Dun: his 1948 break there was followed by nine weeks in 1949 and five in 1950. Work and visitors pursued him and once, when Nehru was abroad, Vallabhbhai even invited the Cabinet to Dehra Dun, yet it was possible there, between things, to reminisce, or talk about nothing in particular, or even play cards. His companions were Manibehn, Shankar and, quite often, Mahavir Tyagi. During other parts of the year Patel would go to Bombay for a change of place and of doctors, and take in Ahmedabad en route, to, among other things, see the Kanugas. On another occasion he cruised from Bombay to Kanyakumari and back on INS Delhi. When the ship passed Goa, Vallabhbhai talked to the captain, Admiral Barnard, about the time it would take to effect a landing on the Portuguese-ruled shore. At Kanyakumari a sense of geography heightened the Sardar's sense of recent history. To Shankar he said: "You are at the feet of Mother India. Close your eyes for some minutes and contemplate what lies between here and the Himalayas and how all that has been woven into one great fabric."¹³³

Pointing out that every foreign trip seemed to refresh Nehru and improve his health, C.R. urged the Sardar in April 1949 to "go to England for a while". Disagreeing, Vallabhbhai replied, "Our life is different. We want to be able to act."¹³⁴ In youth his greatest desire, going abroad seemed a dereliction of duty now. While his Indian "holidays" rested his body, they did not relax his mind and he did not always emerge stronger from them. Nehru was right in charging Patel with "a bad habit of worrying"¹³⁵ and an incapacity "to forget our troubles".¹³⁶ A doctor's advice to read light or humorous stuff fell on deaf ears.¹³⁷ Weakening himself, he was also losing friends. Doctor Kanuga died in October 1949.

Patel to Nandubehn, 18.10.49: *I am gripping a pen for the first time in months....So Doctor has gone. We had been praying that God would release him from his unbearable agony....You have done all you could. If you don't like it there, you can come here and stay with me after the rites are completed.*¹³⁸

Six months later it was Nandubehn's turn. "Do not grieve over Nandubehn's going," Vallabhbhai wrote to the Kanugas' son. "I was certain that she was not going to live after Doctor's departure."¹³⁹ But sadness had accompanied the certainty, and Patel felt increasingly lonely. Epochal though his work in the capital had been, Delhi was not his home. He had found numerous associates but

not many friends. To Shankarlal Parikh, one of the two initiators of the 1918 Kheda satyagraha, he wrote: "Close friends like you come again and again in my thoughts."¹⁴⁰ Yet many a familiar landmark was absent when the Sardar went to Ahmedabad, or Bardoli, or Bombay. He missed Gandhi, and Mahadev, and the Kanugas.

A part of his heart's hunger was satisfied, however, by the loyalty and affection of persons like Menon, H. M. Patel, Iengar and Shankar. At times they drew him out on the past, or the present. Vallabhbhai was glad to have intelligent hearers. They, on their part, could not forget the trust and dignity the Sardar gave them. Iengar would afterwards recall the Sardar's readiness to endorse his decisions, at times even when Vallabhbhai disagreed with them. He did so, Patel explained, to safeguard "the prestige of the leading officer of the Home Ministry".¹⁴¹ He protected this prestige in other ways as well.

One day (writes Iengar) I was in his bedroom discussing official business when Manibehn entered the room in a hurry and announced that the Maharaja of Patiala had arrived. I assumed that the visit concerned some important matter and, rising, told the Sardar that I would wait outside while he talked with the Maharaja.

The Sardar shook his head and replied: "It is to you that I have given an appointment, not him. Sit down." He then asked his daughter to invite the Maharaja to enter. As soon as he came in, he greeted him and, pointing to a chair some distance from him, said, "Maharaja Sahib, please sit down there."

He next turned to me and said, "Go on, Iengar." I completed my work in about ten minutes, (whereupon), pointing to a chair near the bed he was lying on, the Sardar added: "Come here, Maharaja Sahib."¹⁴²

In Vallabhbhai's changing world, Gandhian associates had to a large extent been replaced by officials – the Mahadev Desais and Narhari Parikhs by the V. P. Menons and H. M. Patels –, but partymen retained their place. "Sardar gave money to party workers and looked after their medical needs etc. even before he was approached," Morarji Desai would recall.¹⁴³ The etcetera covered a lot. To the son of Kanjibhai Desai, Patel's successor as the GPCC chief, the Sardar said in September 1948: "Hitu, I am giving you a final warning. If you don't find a girl, you will have to marry the one I find."¹⁴⁴ The fatherly or avuncular concern came through to some rulers as well* but, as Morarji found, it had a stern component:

* "The Maharaja of Bhavnagar used to tell that when he met the Sardar he always felt he was meeting his own father." – Rasiklal Parikh.¹⁴⁵

As Home Minister of Bombay I had not done two or three things that he had asked me to do. He stopped talking to me. I would go to Delhi, call on him and come out in a few minutes. He wouldn't say a thing. This went on for about a year. I did not tell anyone else about it. Then one morning he called me on the phone, asked me how I was and broke the ice himself.¹⁴⁶

While conscious of Morarji's qualities, Vallabhbhai found him stubborn. Needing, on one occasion, to instruct Bombay over the phone, Patel told D. P. Mishra, who happened to be with him: "I hope Kher is available, otherwise I will have to talk to Morarji and he would start arguing."¹⁴⁷ Yet Morarji would afterwards recall an interesting fact about Vallabhbhai's phone calls:

He paid out of his salary for telephone calls made to PCC chiefs. Even Congress funds were not debited. Manibehn kept the account.¹⁴⁸

The phone was Patel's link with the men who backed his political moves: Pant and C. B. Gupta in the U.P., D. P. Mishra and Ravi Shankar Shukla in the Central Provinces, S. K. Patil in Bombay, Gopichand Bhargava and Pratap Singh Kairon in Punjab, K. C. Reddy in Mysore, Kala Venkata Rao in the Andhra districts....The officials, too, were constantly reporting to him over the phone, or he was contacting them himself. Next only to Manibehn, the telephone was his mainstay.

Manibehn's vigilance and care had not nagged an iota. Dahyabhai, however, who had headed Congress's group in the Bombay Corporation from 1946 to 1949 and would perform capably in Parliament after the Sardar's death, gave his father an anxious moment or two in 1950. He came to Delhi for permission to exchange a Karachi company that he and a partner had acquired in 1945 for land in Bombay left by a Muslim who had gone to Pakistan. The possibility that his son might seek or receive a favour in the capital incensed the Sardar, who ordered Dahyabhai to return to Bombay. "Anger rose in me," Vallabhbhai told Ghanshyamdas Birla a day or two later. "I told him he was going to get me out of here."¹⁴⁹ The ill-fated purchase of the Karachi company, valueless in India after partition, ruined Dahyabhai.¹⁵⁰ The son again angered the Sardar by touching a public fund for an advance for business needs. That Dahyabhai had intended to reimburse the fund in a few days did not mollify his father, who showed his displeasure by avoiding the Hem Prabha flat for a period.¹⁵¹ Future rulers were to reject as too high Patel's norms over phone bills and on a Minister's attitude to his son.

His astuteness was unimpaired. When, three months after C.R.'s retirement as Governor-General, Nehru told Vallabhbhai of his wish to recall Rajaji, the Sardar at once welcomed the idea – and said that C.R. would make an excellent Foreign Minister! Thrown by the unexpected return, Jawaharlal nodded in apparent agreement but did not relish the idea of giving up his portfolio. In the event, C.R. joined as Minister without portfolio in the summer of 1950, when the Cabinet was reshuffled. Munshi was inducted as Food Minister. All told, the reshuffle strengthened the Sardar.

But he did not covet Nehru's job or defy him. He had agreed. when Nehru pressed him, to ask the Maharaja of Kashmir to leave the State. Karan Singh, the young Yuvraj, succeeded his father as Kashmir's constitutional head. Earlier sent for medical treatment, on the Sardar's suggestion, to America, Karan Singh would afterwards recall the occasion when the blow fell on his father.

Evidently Jawaharlal had left it to the Sardar to get down to brass tacks with [my father]. On 29th April (1949) we had a meal with the Sardar. After dinner my parents and the Sardar went into another room....

The Sardar told my father gently but firmly that although Sheikh Abdullah was pressing for his abdication,...it would be sufficient if he and my mother absented themselves from the State for a few months. This, he said, was in the national interest.

My father was stunned. He emerged from the meeting ashen-faced, while my mother was fighting back her tears. The Sardar also looked grim as he saw us to the door.¹⁵²

His own opinions were again suppressed by Vallabhbhai in October 1949, while Nehru was abroad, when the Constituent Assembly considered Kashmir. Despite strong feelings among members, Patel, who was functioning as Acting Prime Minister, acquiesced in a special status for Kashmir, inclusive of concessions that went beyond what Jawaharlal had accepted before his departure. Abdullah pressed for the concessions, Gopalaswami and Azad backed him, and the Sardar did not stand in the way. The three – Azad, Abdullah and Gopalaswami – seemed to represent Nehru's wishes, which Vallabhbhai did not want to repudiate in Jawaharlal's absence. However, in conversations with members Patel predicted trouble. "Jawaharlal royega," he said. ("Jawaharlal will rue it.")¹⁵³ Four years later – three years after Vallabhbhai's death –, Abdullah was dismissed and arrested. Detained for 13 years, Abdullah would return as Chief Minister of Kashmir in 1975 and hold the post until his death in 1982.

Patel was unhappy with many of India's steps over Kashmir, including the offer of a plebiscite, the reference to the UN, the ceasefire that left a fair part of the State in Pakistani hands and the removal of the Maharaja. But though occasionally dropping a remark or a hint,* he never spelt out his own solution. In fact in August 1950 he said to Jayaprakash, "Kashmir is insoluble".¹⁵⁹ Jayaprakash was right when he observed after Vallabhbhai's death that even those close to him could not have said how the Sardar would have tackled Kashmir. "The Sardar," as J.P. put it, "might not have disclosed his mind or, maybe, practical-minded as he was, he might have thought it pointless to apply his mind to the problem unless he was called upon to handle it."¹⁶⁰ Kashmir was Nehru's baby and Vallabhbhai made no move to pick it up.

Patel was responsible for the Preventive Detention Act. He had felt the need for it early in 1950, when various provincial High Courts ordered the release of some 2,000 Communists detained across the country. Believing them a danger, Vallabhbhai told Parliament:

*Our fight is not with Communism or with those who believe in the theory of Communism but with those whose object is to overthrow by violence a Government established by law and whose only purpose is to tamper with communications.... The criminal liberties of a few have to be curtailed to preserve the civil liberties of many*¹⁶¹.

Claiming that he had spent "two sleepless nights" over the measure, Patel dramatically read out, at the end of the debate on the Bill, two Communist Party pamphlets inciting people to burn buses, uproot rails and attack jails and Congress offices.¹⁶² Though he had agreed to it, Nehru did not speak on the Bill, which became law after five hours' debate.

Vallabhbhai would stride into the Parliament chamber with an air of confidence, silence the benches with his entry and betray no emotion on his face when praised or censured. "The Sardar in private, they say, relaxes," wrote a contemporary observer. "He smiles without reservation and exclaims without forethought. But

* "Kashmir too might have been solved but Jawaharlal did not let the troops go from Baramula to Domel. He sent them towards Poonch." Patel to Prasad during a talk in Dehra Dun, 29.6.49.¹⁵⁴ "Events seem to be indicating the wisdom of the line which you suggested in December 1947 but we had not accepted for reasons which you know." Letter from Patel to Mountbatten, 16.3.50.¹⁵⁵ Mountbatten was for the State's partition. "I can solve Kashmir in six months. I would send Sikh settlers to the Valley." Patel to Achyut Patwardhan.¹⁵⁶ "India has broken its back over Kashmir." Patel to Bakshi Ghulam Mohammed, 11.7.50.¹⁵⁷ "In Kashmir we are spending crores, (yet) if there is a plebiscite in the Valley, we are bound to lose." Patel to R. K. Patil, 28.9.50.¹⁵⁸ The remarks are impromptu and contradictory.

the private Sardar is rarely on public view.”¹⁶³ Vallabhbhai spoke himself of his caution. “When I want to speak,” he told Parliament in March 1949, “I tremble, because I am afraid of making a slip. Therefore, I rarely speak.”¹⁶⁴ Their infrequency lent greater weight to his parliamentary interventions. “When his turn came, the members sat up eagerly, the empty benches were rapidly filled.”¹⁶⁵ Patel would rise sombrely, clear his throat and speak. His deep voice did not go up or down in pitch, there were no gestures of arm, finger or head, he did not strive for rhythm or alliteration and his phrases were clear rather than clever. Critics got generous helpings of scorn and ridicule. With the rest he carried conviction by sounding firm in his views and sure of his facts.

In neither Hindi nor English – he used both languages in Parliament – could he reproduce the eloquence of his Gujarati speeches, rich with the peasant’s or, if necessary, a literary idiom. Though unchaste, Vallabhbhai’s Hindi was perfectly comprehensible, and while his early English speeches in Parliament or the Constituent Assembly were halting, he soon acquired fluency and effectiveness. But to him Parliament was, in the main, a forum for considering laws, not for displaying emotion, learning or wit. Yet despite his impassivity his feelings sometimes showed. When, on one occasion, Maulana Hasrat Mohani remarked that Patel had accepted partition, Vallabhbhai replied: “He is carried away by his prejudices when he says I am responsible for partition.”¹⁶⁶ That was not Mohani’s charge; Patel’s reaction showed touchiness over his role in partition.

The temptation to interrupt Assembly proceedings with a smart remark was one he almost always resisted, but there were exceptions, as when Durgabai, a champion of women’s equality, called for “a state where religion, caste or creed will have no place”. “Also sex!” Vallabhbhai interjected.¹⁶⁷ During Question Hour his answers were often monosyllabic, “Oh yes”, “I can’t say”, “Not known” and “Of course”, being some of his standard replies. Not many supplementaries were put to him, a testimony to the awe in which he was held. The fear was as much of his power as of his retort. A picture of Patel’s style of answering questions, his humour and his views is provided by the following excerpts:

Ramnarain Singh: *Were the wishes of the people consulted in making all these arrangements (tax-free privy purses to rulers)?*

Patel: *Yes, generally.** (laughter) Singh: *In what way?* P.: *In the usual way.* (more laughter) (Constituent Assembly, Legislative, 10.8.48)¹⁶⁸

* We have seen that this was not so.

Deshbandhu Gupta: *May I know if the Honourable Member will take into consideration the fact that the financial condition of the municipality of Delhi is rather bad? In view of this will Government reconsider its decision and make good the loss the municipality has suffered?* P.: *The financial condition of the Delhi municipality is better than the financial condition of the Central Government.* (Central Assembly, 28.3.47)¹⁶⁹

Deshbandhu Gupta: *Is the Hon. Minister aware that assurances that a decision (in respect of a capital for East Punjab) would be made shortly have been made by the Prime Minister, and that there is a feeling among people that this period "shortly" should be defined?* P.: *It is already defined in Webster's dictionary.* (Constituent Assembly, Legislative, 19.2.48)¹⁷⁰

Bhupinder Singh Mann: *May I know how many times the police resorted to lathi-charge to disperse the refugees during the last four days?* P.: *As many times as it was found necessary to disperse unruly crowds.* (Constituent Assembly, Legislative, 4.9.48)¹⁷¹

Hriday Nath Kunzru: *When will the Government's "active consideration" (of Hyderabad) result in action?* P.: *Before the patience of the Hon. Member is exhausted.* (Constituent Assembly, Legislative, August 1948)¹⁷²

Asked just before Operation Polo how the Government would respond to Hyderabad's request for facilities for a delegation to the UN, Vallabhbhai replied: "We would give them the same facilities that we would extend to a delegation of U.P. Zamindars going to the UN."¹⁷³

* * *

Four times Patel served as Acting Prime Minister, first in the autumn of 1948, next in April 1949, then in the autumn of the same year and finally in June 1950. He liked the honour and did not mind its chores, which included presiding at Cabinet meetings and writing a fortnightly letter to provincial Premiers. In October 1949, while Nehru was abroad and the Sardar Acting Prime Minister, Bhimsen Sachar was replaced as Punjab's Premier by Gopichand Bhargava. Whether or not, as Sachar charged, Vallabhbhai had used Jawaharlal's absence to effect the change, Bhargava was a Patel ally. Stories that Vallabhbhai "will take advantage of Nehru's absence" had also circulated a year earlier, when Pattabhi and Tandon were competing, on the eve of another of Nehru's foreign trips, for Congress's chair. Kidwai, who had for long opposed Patel as well as Tandon, informed Jawaharlal of a report that "after your departure Sardar Sahib will issue a statement supporting Tandonji and will ask the provincial Ministers to support Tandonji".¹⁷⁴ When

Nehru relayed the report to Vallabhbhai, the latter wrote back: "If I had any statement to make, I would have made it while you are here."¹⁷⁵

No matter where, in the country or outside, Jawaharlal was, and no matter what political aims Patel may have nursed, toppling Nehru was never one of them. His short spells as Acting Prime Minister induced no such temptation. But he harboured the desire to contain Nehru. His motives were doubtless mixed. At times he wished to get even or to protect his own influence. At other times he sensed the harm to India that an unchecked Nehru could cause. We have seen that in the autumn of 1949 Patel skilfully and successfully opposed Jawaharlal's desire to install C.R. as India's first President. In the summer of 1950 he again felt the urge to show Nehru his limits.

The question of a successor for Pattabhi, who had sat for over 18 months in Congress's chair,* provided the opportunity. Purshottamdas Tandon's supporters in the U.P., where he was the PCC chief, wanted him to stand again. Also in the field was Shankarrao Deo. Both names, as well as some others, figured in a discussion between Vallabhbhai and Nehru in Dehra Dun on July 5. While professing affection for Tandon and high regard for his integrity, Jawaharlal made it plain that he could not support him. In Nehru's view, Tandon, Hindi's leading champion and the owner of a striking bearded face and an independent mind, had become "a symbol of a communal and revivalist outlook".¹⁷⁶ Among other things, Jawaharlal had taken exception to Tandon's "presence and presidency" at a refugees' conference in Delhi at which, in Nehru's opinion, "wholly objectionable decisions" were taken.¹⁷⁷ The Sardar was equally frank with Nehru about their Ahmednagar colleague, Deo, whose espousal of linguistic provinces and keenness on a large Marathi-speaking State, inclusive of districts then belonging to C.P. and Hyderabad, had estranged Vallabhbhai.

While not seeing eye to eye on either Deo or Tandon, Nehru and Patel seemed at one at their Dehra Dun meeting against Kripalani, who was eager to enter the lists again. Neither the Sardar nor Nehru had been comfortable with Kripalani's 1946-47 tenure as Congress President. On his part, Kripalani had felt ignored. Early in 1950 he had apparently said to Deo that it was his life's mission to destroy the Nehru-Patel Government.¹⁷⁸ The Sardar brought up the name of H. C. Mookerjee, the Bengali Christian, but Nehru felt that he was not popular enough, an assessment that Patel could not dispute.

Ending at this point, the July 5 consultation was thus inconclusive. On July 10 Vallabhbhai returned to Delhi. Three days thereafter he

* Congress did not hold a plenary in 1949. Constitution-making and the changeover to a Republic took precedence.

was told by C.R., who had just joined the Cabinet, that he, Rajaji, had proposed to Nehru that the Sardar should succeed Pattabhi. Patel told C.R. that he would consider the suggestion if it came from Jawaharlal's heart.¹⁷⁹ Nehru did not react favourably and conveyed his view to C.R., who, serving as an intermediary, passed it on to Vallabhbhai. The Sardar made no comment, but his feelings can be guessed.¹⁸⁰ On August 2 Nehru dropped in at 1 Aurangzeb Road and suggested Rajaji's name. "Yes," said Vallabhbhai, "he is entitled to it." The remark alluded to the fact that C.R. had never been Congress President. Added Patel: "I will speak to him but I don't think he will agree."¹⁸¹ C.R. did not agree. Azad then proposed S. K. Patil. Vallabhbhai agreed, whereupon Azad went to obtain Nehru's reaction. Meanwhile Patel asked Morarji over the phone to have Patil formally recommended.

The Sardar had readied two strings for his bow. He was prepared to give total support to Tandon and had said so to Pant in Dehra Dun on July 8: wanting, as always, to be certain of his ground, he had asked Pant whether Tandon would remain firm under pressure.¹⁸² While retaining the Tandon string, Vallabhbhai was also willing to consider a candidate that he and Nehru could jointly back. But Jawaharlal rejected the Patil idea, and thereafter there was talk – floated, Patel believed, by Rafi Kidwai and Mridula Sarabhai – of Nehru taking the party chair as well. Prepared to tolerate this, Vallabhbhai said to Azad: "If he wants to become President, I will propose him and you and Rajaji will second him."¹⁸³

Not yet ready for such a dual role himself, but anxious to prevent Tandon's election, Nehru made two moves. First he convened such of the WorCom members as were in Delhi to Azad's house and told them that Tandon was unacceptable to him. Patel did not attend the meeting; he had in fact urged Nehru not to call it. A consensus between him and Nehru was for the two of them to work out; it could not be imposed by a committee or a group. Jawaharlal's second approach was a direct one to Tandon, a letter that candidly conveyed the view that "your election... would mean great encouragement to certain forces in India which I consider harmful". He would have to express this opinion, Nehru added, "in some form or other, before the Congress election takes place".¹⁸⁴

Despite Nehru's direct word to him, Prasad had refused, a year earlier, to vacate the threshold of the Republic's Presidency. Following Prasad's example, Tandon, who was older than Nehru and had known him for half a century, refused to withdraw his nomination. His reply to Jawaharlal was dignified, warm and frank. Explaining that as chairman of the refugees' conference he had moderated its tone, Tandon argued that revivalism might mean

renaissance even though it could also, in less careful hands, lead to reaction. After reminding Nehru that he, Tandon, had "openly advocated Hindu-Muslim marriages" and that caste orthodoxy had played little part in his life, Tandon added:

While you and I have agreed on and worked together on many vital problems, there have been some matters on which we have not seen eye to eye – the adoption of Hindi as the national language and the partition of the country being the chief among them.

*I assure you that the bitterest language you may employ against me will not succeed in making me bitter or abate my personal affection for you. I have loved you all these years as a younger brother, though my feeling is unobtrusive.*¹⁸⁵

Vallabhbhai was greatly stirred when he read the letter. Jawaharlal's response was to issue a public statement in which, after saying that "it would not be proper" for him, "as long as I am Prime Minister", to assume the party Presidentship, he expressed the hope that "all decisions will be taken" on the basis of Congress's "old approach to political, communal and other problems".¹⁸⁶ Tandon was not mentioned but Nehru had indicated to everyone that he hoped Tandon would lose.

Yet would he? Many who did not fully share Tandon's view of India's past were nonetheless ready, because of his integrity, to vote for him. He was particularly strong in the vote-rich Hindi provinces. Rafi Kidwai, who had become Nehru's chief adviser on party matters, realized that while Deo had no chance of defeating Tandon, Kripalani, having taught in Bihar and Gujarat and lived for years in the U.P., was a better bet. On Rafi's counsel, Jawaharlal transferred his support to Kripalani. Remembering the Nehru-Kripalani disputes of Ahmednagar and his recent (July 5) talk with Jawaharlal in Dehra Dun, the Sardar was astonished. "I have been shaken to the bones," he said to C.R. "How low he has stooped. I had better go to my Ashram."¹⁸⁷ C.R. too felt aggrieved that Nehru had kept his switch to Kripalani "a secret from me".¹⁸⁸ Vallabhbhai and Rajaji both pointed out to Nehru that Kripalani's criticisms of Jawaharlal's stand on the Hindu-Muslim and refugee questions had been stronger than Tandon's. But the die was cast.

Why hadn't Vallabhbhai striven harder for a consensus? An itch for a tussle and an instinctive grasp of Tandon's strength had influenced him, but there were other factors as well. One was a feeling of being excluded, despite his membership of the Cabinet's Foreign Affairs Committee, from consultations on foreign policy.¹⁸⁹ Another was the increase in Jawaharlal's "critical interest" in the functioning of the Home and States Ministries.¹⁹⁰

Tandon's defeat was now Jawaharlal's priority. Through Kidwai's good offices, a Nehru-Kripalani meeting took place on August 25, four days before the polling. "I went just to thank him for his attitude towards me," Kripalani told reporters as he came out.¹⁹¹ With this statement all doubts were dispelled. Every Congress voter knew that the Tandon-Kripalani contest was also a Patel-Nehru one. Vallabhbhai was on the phone to his allies. Jawaharlal's campaign manager was Kidwai, much younger than Patel, and healthier. Also playing her part, Mridula urged Deo to withdraw in Kripalani's favour, but the Maharashtrian Congressman did not oblige her.

Conscious of the possibility of defeat, Nehru informed Vallabhbhai in writing, on August 25, that he would treat Tandon's election as a vote of no-confidence. If Tandon won, he would neither function in the WorCom nor continue as Prime Minister.¹⁹² Patel could not, in all conscience, urge Tandon to withdraw at this stage. Neither could he ask Congressmen to vote against Tandon. What he could do, and did, was to plead with Nehru not to carry out his threat. He said to C.R., however, that he did not think that Jawaharlal would act up to his threat.¹⁹³ "I have known you for 30 years," Vallabhbhai told Nehru on August 27, "but I haven't been able to enter your heart."¹⁹⁴ The Sardar also offered to sign a joint statement with Nehru to the effect that irrespective of differences over candidates the two of them were "in entire accord on fundamentals" and that whoever won the election would have to conform to Congress's policies. The time for statements was over, Jawaharlal replied.¹⁹⁵

Polling took place in 24 locations on August 29. Though both sides made their private estimates that night, votes were counted only on September 1. Vallabhbhai slept little on the night of August 31 and not at all in the afternoon of September 1. That evening he heard that Tandon had won with 1306 votes as against Kripalani's 1092. Deo got 202. While Tandon got fewer votes in Bihar than Patel had expected, Kripalani secured none at all in Gujarat, where he had worked for several years and made numerous friends. It was a tribute to the Sardar's strength in his home province. In contrast, Tandon won with a comfortable majority in Nehru's home province, the U.P. "Have you brought Jawaharlal's resignation?" Vallabhbhai asked C.R. when they met after the result.¹⁹⁶ But he was not expecting it, and it did not come. Nehru had changed his mind.

* * *

"The Sardar was the greatest administrator we had," Kripalani would say in 1974.¹⁹⁷ Recalling, in the same breath, Vallabhbhai's "iron discipline" that denied him even "a single vote" in Gujarat,

Kripalani would allege that the Sardar “resented all opposition to his will” and that “this trait of his grew with years and with power”.¹⁹⁸ Earlier, their views had coincided. According to Kripalani, “We consulted each other on every important matter. We were considered as inseparable.”¹⁹⁹ The rift started in the latter part of 1946 when, along with Nehru, the Sardar inherited the Raj and Kripalani became party President. In 1950 not only Nehru and Kripalani but also Deo, Pattabhi, Mahtab and P. C. Ghosh – members, along with Kripalani, of “Patel’s group” in Ahmednagar – found themselves ranged against the Sardar.

We may see this rift, as also the Patel-Nehru rift, as a by-product of power. The pursuit of liberty had been transformed irresistibly into the pursuit of power, which, when independence came, fell chiefly into the hands of Nehru and Patel. Heart-burning in the others was inevitable. It is sad, nonetheless, to reflect that friends and inseparables fell out. Yet, as we have repeatedly seen, there was a limit to the power that Vallabhbhai sought: he had barred himself from the Prime Ministership. “Yes, if I had been Jawaharlal’s age,” he told Azad in September, “I would have said I will run the Government.”²⁰⁰ But he was reconciled to the fact that he was not, and earlier he had been ready to quit the Government if either the Mahatma or Nehru wanted him to.

Also of relevance is what Patel did with power or, rather, what he did not do with it. He did not employ it to generate money, jewellery or property for himself or his offspring, whose lives were in no way dependent on his being in office. A wholehogger rather than a dabbler in the power game, he played to win, which was why Kripalani drew a blank in Gujarat, but the charge that Vallabhbhai brooked no dissent is not true. Prasad noted that “if pressed hard by his colleagues”, Vallabhbhai “would carry out their wishes”, though “he would not leave one in doubt about his own opinion”.²⁰¹ No official working with the Sardar complained of intolerance. Though it seemed unlikely in so stern a character, the openness of his mind struck civil servants.²⁰²

However, content with the duumvirate, he did not encourage a third centre of power, whether inside the Government or in the Congress organization, an omission contributing to the estrangement from him of Kripalani, Pattabhi, Deo and Ghosh. If, to give an instance, it was only through newspaper reports that Kripalani, when he was Congress President, came to know of some important decisions of the Government,²⁰³ the fault was as much Vallabhbhai’s as Nehru’s.

Smelling victory a day before the Tandon-Kripalani poll, Patel had said to C.R.: "At the time of Rajen Babu's elections he got a slap in the face. This is the second."²⁰⁴ Some moments later, however, after an exchange of laments about Jawaharlal's dependence on Rafi, which was followed by C.R. saying, "What is the use? Let me go," Vallabhbhai observed: "Let's all go."²⁰⁵ In Patel's mind, victory could herald his own departure but not Nehru's. So when Tandon called on the Sardar, having proceeded to 1 Aurangzeb Road straight from the airport,²⁰⁶ Vallabhbhai advised him to call also on Nehru (and on Prasad, Rajaji, Pattabhi and Azad) and to offer Jawaharlal "all the support he could".²⁰⁷ The Sardar had suggestions, too, for Tandon's presidential address, aimed at preventing a confrontation with Nehru, who, Vallabhbhai well knew, would be Congress's main vote-puller in the general elections, free India's first, that were not far off. Aware of his indispensability, Nehru asked, as soon as Tandon's election was announced, for a reiteration of Congress's stand on economic, foreign and communal questions. Patel might win on personalities and postings; he would win on issues.

Congressmen assembled at Nasik in Maharashtra in the third week of September. A few days earlier C.R. had said to Vallabhbhai: "A Madrasi engineer in Nasik has asked me where I would stay." P. "Stay with me." C.R. "Where will you stay?" P. "I don't change friends. I will stay at Birla House."²⁰⁸ The Nasik session approved the Nehru-Liaquat Pact and the Government's stand on communal and foreign affairs. In his address Tandon rejected the notion of a Hindu Government. The only division in Nasik was over price controls. The right wing wanted their removal but were defeated 190 to 117 in the AICC. On other matters Nehru's drafts were accepted without demur. During the entire Nasik proceedings, Vallabhbhai made only one speech – from a chair, seated. He was tired and unwell and, despite his victory, unhappy. Nehru's attitude to him had not been corrected by Tandon's election; his own health seemed to be failing; "many who used to gather round him were now hovering round Nehru, protesting their personal allegiance" to the latter;²⁰⁹ and he did not really agree with some of the nuances in Nehru's drafts.

Despite a request from C.R., he declined to second Nehru's resolution on the communal question.²¹⁰ Disapproval of its wording or of Nehru's attitude may have been the reason. But he did not oppose this or any other resolution, and his discontent gave birth to no thought of revolt. His chief desire, in fact, was that Nehru should reconcile himself to Tandon's Presidentship, and it is noteworthy that he should have advised delegates from Gujarat calling on him at Birla House to "do what Jawaharlal says" and "pay no attention to this controversy".²¹¹ Discretion, sulkiness and ill health conspired to keep

him silent in Nasik. "You have completely effaced yourself this time," Satyanarayan Sinha told him.²¹²

Soon, however, a crisis arose over Kidwai. Nehru declared that he would stay out of Tandon's WorCom if Kidwai was excluded from it. Though the Congress constitution empowered its President to choose his executive, Tandon was willing to accommodate Jawaharlal's wishes. But he drew the line at Kidwai, his long-standing foe. A day before the Tandon-Kripalani poll, Kidwai had said to C.R.: "If Tandon succeeds and he (Nehru) does not resign, I will say publicly that he is an opportunist."²¹³ Jawaharlal had not resigned from the Government and Rafi had not yet arraigned him as an opportunist, but could Nehru afford to abandon his comrade, as he called Kidwai?²¹⁴ C.R. and Azad urged Vallabhbhai to persuade Tandon to include Kidwai. The Maulana prefaced his plea with the words "Mere Bhai" ("Brother Mine"). A day later, Azad took the Sardar's hand in his and appealed to him to say something to Nehru.²¹⁵

But on Rafi neither Patel nor Tandon was willing to budge. "I know Rafi better than Jawaharlal does," Tandon said to Azad, and the Sardar indicated that he would rather leave the Government than ask Tandon to take Kidwai.²¹⁶ "I will happily find my exit," Vallabhbhai told Azad, and to C.R. he said: "You suggest to him (Nehru) that if he only throws a hint, Vallabhbhai will go out of the Government." "How can I say that?" answered C.R. "It will harm the country."²¹⁷

Patel would not yield over Rafi but he would do another difficult thing. He would publicly reaffirm his loyalty to Nehru. On October 2, laying the foundation stone for Kasturbagram, a centre for women near Indore, Vallabhbhai spoke "amid sobs and great emotion" of himself as a soldier and of his promise to Gandhi:

Today I see before me the whole picture of life ever since I joined Bapu's army. The love which Ba bore me I never experienced from my own mother. Whatever paternal love fell to my lot, I got from Bapu and Ba.

Bapu gave life to a dead country. Ba lent him a helping hand. Let the picture of both of them be constantly before our eyes. We may commit errors. They will always be there to take our account.

We were all soldiers in their camp. I have been referred to as the Deputy Prime Minister. I never think of myself in these terms. Jawaharlal Nehru is our leader. Bapu appointed him as his successor and had even proclaimed him as such.

It is the duty of all Bapu's soldiers to carry out his bequest. Whoever does not do so from the heart in the proper spirit will be a sinner before God. I am not a disloyal soldier. I never think

*of the place that I am occupying. I know only this much, and am satisfied, that I still am where Bapu posted me.*²¹⁸

A stirred C.R. wrote to the Sardar:

*Even in the printed report your Indore speech was touching. In the actual spoken word it must have been so greatly moving. You have done all one can do. If even this does not satisfy people's suspicions, what can man do!*²¹⁹

But it did not look as if Nehru was satisfied, and Vallabhbhai wrote to C.R.:

*It is painful to prolong this process of mental torture and we must end it now as I see no hope.... I have gone to the farthest extent to smoothen his path but I see that it is all no good, and we can only leave it to God.*²²⁰

But he had been mistaken. Two days later, Jawaharlal said to Tandon that he would join his WorCom after all, without Kidwai. The other WorCom names were settled between Tandon, Vallabhbhai, Nehru and Azad at a meeting at 1 Aurangzeb Road. Jawaharlal could not help remarking at the end that the list was colourless. "Yes," agreed Patel, "if one man with coloured glasses and plain white dress joined, it would add colour." The reference was to Rafi but even Nehru smiled.²²¹

* * *

Patel had been incurious about a number of things. Struggle and later politics had filled his life. He had allowed no other interest, and neither God's handiwork nor man's, to absorb him. He did not stare at the firmament or at a beetle or even at the flowers that he could grow. He asked for no melody and, when out of prison, opened no book. "I have now reached the stage," he said on August 15, "when time is of the essence."²²² When, with him, was it not? Early in October, however, he agreed to see Ellora and Ajanta. He had to go to Hyderabad and the detour could be fitted in. Manibehn was with him. The monsoon had just ended, the undulating landscape was green and fresh, and the streams were running full. Carried in a chair through some of the caves, Vallabhbhai saw the frescoes they had concealed and marvelled at the art and skills of ancient India.

At the end of the month he went to Ahmedabad and spent five perfectly apt days there, including his 75th birthday. The first copies of Narhari Parikh's biography of him came off the press while Patel

was in Ahmedabad. He had vetted it, and a discussion with Narhari of its contents had formed part of some of the busiest of his recent days. The thought that the Kanugas were no more gave a pang to Vallabhbhai who, on this occasion, was Kasturbhai Lalbhai's house guest. He visited the home where Nandubehn and the Doctor had lived and where he had spent many a stress-free hour. And he went to Gandhi's dwelling in the Sabarmati Ashram.

Some men leapt off the pages of Narhari's book to be with Vallabhbhai in Ahmedabad. Ravishankar Maharaj, Shankarlal Parikh, Ashabhai of Ras, Jugatram Dave and others were alive and well and keen to set eyes again on the man they had helped, and who had helped them, and who was as eager to see their faces. Folk from Karamsad came to greet the favourite son. Dahyabhai, Bhanumati and Gautam turned up from Bombay to be with Father and Grandfather. A birthday surprise was the arrival of three Rajpramukhs, the Maharajas of Patiala, Jaipur and Gwalior, who gave Vallabhbhai a bound volume, inscribed by them, of the White Paper on Indian States, which had recounted their surrender before the Sardar! Menon had flown into Ahmedabad with them. In their different ways, ex-rebels and ex-rulers tried to show their affection and respect for one who had very few equals as rebel or ruler.

Some present rulers, governmental and party, also of course joined him, including Morarji and Kanjibhai, and Mridula's father Ambalal gave a lunch. But it wasn't all felicitation or nostalgia. There was work: while in Ahmedabad, Patel gave a helping hand to enterprises he had helped initiate – the milk scheme of Anand and the educational projects of Vidyanagar. He even raised funds for the general elections and handed them over to Morarji. There were meetings. And there was a sense – in Manibehn's heart, as she touched her father's feet on October 31, in Shankar's, as he did likewise, and in the hearts of several others, probably including Vallabhbhai's own – that he was in his beloved Gujarat for the last time.

On November 2 he returned to Delhi and plunged into the Tibet question. Invaded in October, Tibet had appealed on October 30 for India's diplomatic help. In his Ahmedabad speeches Patel had spoken of "aggression". On November 4 the papers said that Tibet had been taken over. Three days later Vallabhbhai sent that letter of his to Nehru. He expected, he told Tandon, "a real fight over foreign policy" with Nehru,²²³ and toyed, for the first time, with the idea of outvoting Nehru in the Cabinet.²²⁴ On November 9, while releasing a book on Swami Dayanand, who, said the Sardar, had "removed the clouds of doubt enveloping the Hindu religion and made it shine like the sun",²²⁵ Patel made another impromptu reference to Tibet:

*A peaceful country has been invaded and it may not survive. We did not think that this would happen....But China did not accept our advice.... Tibet is a religious-minded country. There has been no aggression from Tibet's side. But when one is intoxicated with power, one does not realize what one is doing.*²²⁶

Shortly after this Vallabhbhai's health collapsed and the tussle over foreign policy never took place. Shankar found him inattentive or forgetful at times²²⁷ and Manibehn noticed that he no longer heard anything spoken softly.²²⁸ His sleep was more restless, pulse higher, heart weaker and intestines more painful. The slightest exertion tired him and he took more and more to his bed. The morning drive was given up, as also speech-making. Reluctant even to send messages, Patel yielded when Tandon pressed him for some lines for a meeting on November 17 in memory of Lajpat Rai. Asked by Vallabhbhai to compose something, Shankar saw to his shock that the Sardar "could not even give me directions as to what I should say."²²⁹

A report that Nehru wanted a Cabinet panel, analogous to the Foreign Affairs Committee, to consider some questions affecting the princely States wounded the Sardar. He thought his powers were being menaced and his judgment questioned.²³⁰ In another report of a likely turn-around of Secretaries Vallabhbhai smelt a wish to penalize officials faithful to him, and he feared for the future of Menon and Shankar "when I am not here".²³¹ Enlarged by illness, his suspicions were neither baseless nor entirely fair.

"Till Bapu's death," Patel had said to C.R. in the middle of October, "I used to oppose him (Nehru) and fight with him. But now I have given it up."²³² In view of Gandhi's last wish that he and Nehru should work together, any open criticism would "look bad".²³³ But he would not remain silent if he found Jawaharlal causing "irreparable harm to the country".²³⁴ An "autocrat"²³⁵ with an "ego",²³⁶ Nehru, Vallabhbhai alleged to C.R., had insulted him before officials.²³⁷ Where or when this had happened was not mentioned, but Vallabhbhai spoke of a "great estrangement".²³⁸ These hard words describe only a facet of the Patel-Nehru relationship in the last quarter of 1950; taken in isolation, they distort the truth. Though fatigued and ill, Vallabhbhai wrote out, on November 14, Jawaharlal's birthday, a letter of greeting in his own hand. And on November 23, when Nehru visited 1 Aurangzeb Road, Patel spoke frankly to him: "I want to talk to you alone when I get a little strength and am able to bear the strain. I have a feeling that you are losing confidence in me." Jawaharlal smiled and said, "I have been losing confidence in myself",²³⁹ a remark belied by the suavity with which it was made. Nehru knew that the brake on him was weakening.

On November 21 Manibehn noticed blood stains on her father's bedclothes. A night nurse and a day nurse were engaged. On some nights the Sardar had to be kept under oxygen. Aware of tension between Manibehn and Sushila Nayar, who had joined the team of doctors assisting him, he said to Sushila one afternoon: "Are you two girls clicking or not?" Manibehn heard the question and her eyes became wet.²⁴⁰ But she was stricter than ever with visitors, either barring their entry or hastening their exit. Prasad, C.R., Nehru, Azad and others would however come for a brief consultation or view or sometimes even for a meeting. Vallabhbhai's opinion of Azad did not wholly change but the last quarter of 1950 saw a greater cordiality between the two; the Sardar knew that the Maulana had played a role in Nehru's eventual decision to join Tandon's WorCom.

By December 5 he had realized that his end was not far. That night Manibehn heard him repeating Nazir's line, "Zindagi kaa yeh tamaasha chand roz" ("Life's fleeting show"). Recollections like this from the Ashram prayers were now not infrequent. President Prasad sat beside him for ten minutes on the 6th but Vallabhbhai was too ill to say anything. When the West Bengal Premier, B. C. Roy, who was also a noted physician, looked him over on December 8, Patel asked him: "Rahna hai ki jaana?" ("Living or going?") "Why would I have come if it was a case of going?" Roy countered. But Vallabhbhai was not persuaded. "Maari naar tammare haathe," ("My life is in Your hands", by Keshav) he recited again and again the next day, and also Kabir's line, "Man laago mero yaar fakiri mein" ("My heart longs for renunciation"). Manibehn was shattered but did not show it. To Ghanshyamdas Birla, who heard the Sardar utter, "Mangal Mandir Kholo Dayamay" ("Open Your blessed door, merciful Lord"),* she said, "The day I feared is coming." Some drops fell from her eyes, and she returned to her nursing and protecting.²⁴¹

Also on the physicians' team were Dr Nathubhai Patel and Dr Gilder of Bombay, both of whom had treated Vallabhbhai for years, and Dr Dhandra of Delhi. "Don't give me that injection," Patel told Nathubhai on December 10. "It makes my stomach worse." Scolding him for losing heart, Nathubhai reminded Vallabhbhai of Bhishma's role from a bed of arrows and of his own will power.²⁴² But Another Will was also asserting itself, to which the Sardar was submitting. The doctors decided that he should move to Bombay's milder weather. The night before his departure Jawaharlal called by and said to Vallabhbhai: "Look, we have to have a frank talk. But you are not to

* When a doctor commented that "that door" would not easily yield — "not one but two or three locks secure it" —, Vallabhbhai replied with a laugh, "Even if there are ten locks the door will swing open," and resumed humming the line. (Viyogi Hari in *Bapu, Bapa Aur Sardar*, Kutir, Delhi, 1967.)

worry. You have to take care of yourself and get well soon."²⁴³ Earlier that day Patel had said to Gadgil: "I am not going to live. Make me a promise." When Gadgil said yes, the Sardar took his friend's hand in his and continued: "Whatever your differences with Panditji, do not leave him."²⁴⁴

On the morning of the 12th he was driven to a pressurized IAF Dakota parked on a strip of the Willingdon airfield and carried in a chair up the steps of the aircraft. Among those gathered near the IAF Dakota were Prasad, Nehru, C.R., Gadgil, Ghanshyamdas and Menon. Vallabhbhai's chair was turned around at the top of the steps. "He saluted everyone with a sad smile from the door."²⁴⁵ Manibehn, Gilder and Nathubhai joined him inside, the door was shut and fastened, the engines roared, the wheels turned and soon the carriage was up in the air, over Delhi and heading south-southwest. Vallabhbhai would be in the skies for four-and-a-half hours, his country below.

Behind him receded his life, as colleague to Jawaharlal – a touchy and at times contemptuous colleague, yet always loyal; as the Government's helmsman and the raja of the Rajas; as watchdog, welder and policeman to India; inheritor, along with Nehru, of the Raj; Congress's decision-maker, displacing the Mahatma, on the eve of freedom; as a lion pacing restlessly in the Ahmednagar cage; as Quit India's indefatigable organizer; stern boss of a party and of Premiers; prisoner and defier of the Raj; Bardoli's brilliant General; Gandhi's rocklike lieutenant, caring friend and merciless leg-puller; the one who smilingly stepped aside for another, for Jawaharlal in later years and for Vithalbhai earlier; the rough haughty fashionably-attired conqueror of the Ahmedabad Bar who yet thirsted for greatness, the adult London student wasting no breath on dalliance, the lawyer feared in Borsad and Godhra, silent husband of young Jhaverba – sad, dear and wrapped in mystery; as the youth who was severe on himself and upon those taking him for granted, the lad with a chip on the shoulder, the neglected fourth son in a family of impoverished peasants, born to Ladba of Nadiad and Jhaverbhai of Karamsad.

He seemed totally exhausted during the last hour in the air. Kher, Morarji and others were at Juhu airfield but Vallabhbhai had no strength to utter a greeting. A Raj Bhavan car took him, Manibehn, Gilder and Nathubhai to Birla House, where he was put under oxygen, nursed and nourished, but his condition did not improve and he groaned and twisted in agony. Unable to bear his suffering, Manibehn prayed: "Restore him to health, but if that is not Your wish, please take him away soon."²⁴⁶ Shortly before 3 a.m. on Friday the 15th he had a heart attack and lost consciousness. After about four hours he revived, asked for water, sipped from a spoon held

by Manibehn, said, "This seems sweet" – Manibehn had given him Ganga water with honey in it –, and lost consciousness again.²⁴⁷

The end came at 9.37 a.m. Dahyabhai, Bhanumati and Bipin were also at the bedside, and Shankar, and Raméshwardas Birla, and other members of the Birla family. After Dahyabhai had bathed his father and wrapped him in a dhoti and kurta, the Sardar was carried to his bed. There he was covered with a shroud made from yarn that he, Vallabhbhai, had spun in 1940: hoping to get a kurta for him out of it, Manibehn had brought the cloth to Bombay. At 1 p.m. he was laid in state on a flower-bedecked pedestal on a verandah. Manibehn put kumkum on his forehead and garlanded him with a wreath of yarn spun by her. Then the gates of Birla House were opened and the multitudes filed past him. Dahyabhai lit the pyre later that day in the public cremation ground in Sonapur, where Vithalbhai, and, before him, Jhaverba had received their last rites; a suggestion for a cremation at Chowpatty had earlier been turned down by the family. Most of Bombay had seen the cortege, and great numbers came to the cremation. Nehru and C.R. had flown from Delhi. So had Prasad, despite Nehru's apparent advice that as President he should remain in the capital.²⁴⁸ All three were weeping unashamedly – even while, beside the pyre, two of them – Rajaji and the President – spoke.

"Sardar's body is being consumed by fire," Prasad said, "but no fire on earth can consume his fame. We grieve for ourselves, not for him."²⁴⁹ Said C.R.: "What inspiration, courage, confidence and force incarnate Vallabhbhai was! We will not see the like of him again."²⁵⁰ In Delhi, Azad spoke that day of Patel's "valour" – "as high as the mountains" – and his "determination" – "as strong as steel".²⁵¹ Before flying to Bombay, Jawaharlal had given the news of Vallabhbhai's going to Parliament: "At 9.37 this morning, the story of his great life ended. It is a great story, as all of us know, as the whole country knows, and history will record it in many pages and call him the builder and consolidator of the new India. But perhaps to many of us here he will be remembered as a great captain of our forces in the struggle for freedom and as one who gave us sound advice in times of trouble as well as in moments of victory, as a friend and colleague on whom one could invariably rely, as a tower of strength which revived wavering hearts."²⁵²

But it was well with Vallabhbhai. His dust had mingled with Jhaverba's, and Vithalbhai's, and his soul, we may believe, had flown to a purer air and found congenial company. Though a prayer of hers had been answered, one woman was inexpressibly sad, and a camera caught her sorrow. But she was a soldier's daughter.

TEN
GLOSSARY
SOURCES AND
BIBLIOGRAPHY
REFERENCES
AND NOTES

THE
HISTORY
OF THE
CITY OF
NEW YORK
FROM
1624 TO
1898

GLOSSARY

ahimsa	non-violence
Arzi Hukumat	Provisional Government
bajri	a cereal
baniya	see vaniya
bawa, bawo	mendicant
bhajan	hymn
Bhil	tribal
chakki	grindstone
chapati	unleavened Indian bread
chaprasi	attendant, peon
charpoy	coir bed
chothai	25 per cent fine
dal	lentil
das	servant
Devlok	Heaven
dharia	scythe with long bamboo-handle
Dharmaraj	prince of virtue
dhoti	garment round waist and legs
dubla	weak
fatwa	edict
firman	edict
gedi dada	stick-and-ragball game
gilli danda	stick-and-bit game
gol	circle or group
gur	jaggery
hazri	attendance
hichko	swing
hututu	breath-holding team game
jaan	life
kameez	shirt
katori	bowl
khadi	handspun handwoven cloth
kho	tag
kodra	coarse corn
kurta	long loose shirt
lehnga	ankle-length skirt
maal	possessions

maan	honour
maanpatra	honour-scroll
mahalkari	head of a taluka segment
mala	rosary, garland
mamlatdar	taluka head
Matushri	Mother
mohalla	lane, locality
mukaddam	foreman
mukhi	head, chief
naari	woman
nivar	tape
pada	male buffaloes; also tables
pagdi	turban
patrika	bulletin, journal
pol	community lane
Prajamandal	People's association
qaum	community
talati	village revenue collector
tapasya	austerities
vaans peepuli	hide-and-seek on trees
vaniya	member of the trader caste
zulum	cruelty or terror

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- 168 R. Gandhi, *Warrior*, p. 111.
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- 170 Ibid., pp. 166-7.
- 171 Ibid., pp. 165-6.
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THREE/1922-29/SARDAR

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- 34 Ibid., pp. 237, 245.
- 35 Ibid., p. 239.
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- 39 Ibid., p. 250.
- 40 Desai, *Vir Vallabhbhai*, p. 44.
- 41 Mashruwala in *Harijan*, 26.1.51, reproduced in Shekhdiwala, (ed.), *Sardar*, p. 136.
- 42 Parikh, *Patel*, (1), p. 262.
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- 52 1.5.24, Nandurkar, (ed.), *Sardarshri na Patro*, (3), p. 17.
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- 55 Ibid., pp. 314-5.
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- 59 Tendulkar, *Mahatma*, (2), p. 172.
- 60 15.9.24, Desai, *Day-to-day*, (4), p. 183.
- 61 Parikh, *Patel*, (1), p. 274.
- 62 Tendulkar, *Mahatma*, (2), p. 198.
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- 70 Ibid., p. 365.
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- 84 *Prajabandhu*, 11.9.27, in Pathak and Sheth, *Civic*, p. 282.
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- 91 Patel to Gandhi, 25.7.27, Nandurkar. (ed.), *Bapu, Sardar and Mahadevbhai*, p. 261; Patel to Manibehn, 25.7.27, Nandurkar, (ed.), *Sardarshri na Patro*, (3), p. 25.
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- 113 Ibid., pp. 263-4.
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- 122 Manibehn in Desai and Desai, (ed.), *Ashram Sansmarano*, pp. 80-1.
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- 142 To author, 27.9.87.
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- 145 Ibid., p. 332.
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- 161 Ibid., p. 339.
- 162 Desai, *Bardoli*, p. 111.
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- 166 Desai, *Bardoli*, p. 108.
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- 169 Ibid., p. 342.
- 170 E. g., comment by Joshi, MLC, in Desai, *Bardoli*, p. 104.
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- 189 Ibid., p. 161.
- 190 Letter of 24.7.28, *Gandhi, Letters*, p. 9.

- 191 See letter from Patel to Desai of 23.7.28 in Nandurkar, (ed.), *Bapu, Sardar ane Mahadevbhai*, pp. 219-20.
- 192 Desai, *Bardoli*, p. 163.
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- 194 Ibid., p. 170.
- 195 Home Dept. Telegram no. SD 843, quoted in Dutt, *Bardoli*, p. 72.
- 196 Desai, *Bardoli*, pp. 167-72. See also G. I. Patel, *Vithalbhai*, pp. 1001-2.
- 197 Desai, *Bardoli*, p. 172.
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- 199 Letter of 16.8.28 in File 197 of 1928, Home Political, National Archives, New Delhi.
- 200 R. Gandhi, *Warrior*, p. 180.
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- 202 Ibid., p. 77.
- 203 Parikh, *Patel*, (1), pp. 373-5.
- 204 Umashankar Joshi to author, Ahmedabad, 8.7.87; also in Joshi's article of Nov. 1974 in *Sanskriti*, Ahmedabad, reproduced in Shekhdiwala, (ed.), *Sardar*, p. 100.
- 205 In May 1929. Quoted in Hardiman, *Peasant Nationalists*, p. 188.
- 206 *Hindustan* and *Praja Mitra* of 13.7.29, quoted in Hardiman, *Peasant Nationalists*, p. 188.
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- 209 Tendulkar, *Mahatma*, (2), p. 441.
- 210 Quoted in R. Gandhi, *Eight Lives*, p. 139.
- 211 Ibid., p. 139.
- 212 Panjabi, *The Indomitable Sardar*, p. viii.
- 213 Parikh, *Patel*, (1), p. 388.
- 214 Ibid., p. 387.

FOUR/1929-34/PRISONER

- 1 Uttamchand Shah to author, *Bardoli*, 27.9.87.
- 2 Quoted in Nandurkar, (ed.), *Sardarshri na Patro*, (3), pp. 23-4.
- 3 Parikh, *Patel*, (1), pp. 389-90.
- 4 Mahadev Desai in *Indian National Herald*, 23.9.28, quoted in *Mahadevbhai ni Diary*, (12), p. 168.
- 5 Parikh, *Patel*, pp. 392-5.
- 6 Ibid., p. 399.
- 7 Ibid., pp. 399-401.
- 8 Desai, *Vir Vallabhbai*, pp. 1-2.
- 9 Parikh, *Patel*, (1), p. 407.
- 10 *Young India*, 5.9.29, quoted in Hardiman, *Peasant Nationalists*, p. 190.
- 11 Bose, *The Indian Struggle*, p. 169.
- 12 Patel to V. P. Menon and H. M. Patel on 15.9.48, DMP. Rani

D. Shankardass in her *Vallabhbhai Patel* (1988) writes: "Narendra Dev...pointed out that in 1929 Patel had been a candidate and Gandhi had a difficult time persuading Patel to withdraw in favour of Jawaharlal Nehru." (p. 181) She has misread the statement by Dev that she cites. (*Bombay Chronicle*, 28.1.39) Dev refers in that statement to Patel's attitude at the end of 1936, not to end-1929. Vallabhbhai's withdrawal in 1929 was instant.

- 13 Brecher, *Nehru*, p. 142.
- 14 Ibid.
- 15 See article by Manibehn reproduced in Shekhdiwala, (ed.), *Sardar*, p. 94.
- 16 Gopal, *Nehru*, (1), p. 226.
- 17 *Young India*, 1.8.29.
- 18 Durgadas, *From Curzon to Nehru and After*, p. 134.
- 19 Brecher, *Nehru*, p. 137.
- 20 Namboodiripad, *India's Freedom Struggle*, p. 388.
- 21 Kripalani, *Autobiography*, (typescript), p. 236.
- 22 Ibid.
- 23 Durgadas, *From Curzon to Nehru and After*, p. 134.
- 24 Brecher, *Nehru*, p. 123.
- 25 Panjabi, *The Indomitable Sardar*, p. 202.
- 26 Letter from Mashruwala to Louis Fischer, 7.11.49, published in Mashruwala, *In Quest of Truth*, p. 148.
- 27 Letter of 23.1.28 in Gopal, *Nehru*, (1), p. 112.
- 28 Mashruwala, *In Quest of Truth*, p. 148.
- 29 See R. Gandhi, *Warrior*, p. 176.
- 30 Gopal, *Nehru*, (1), p. 127.
- 31 Brecher, *Nehru*, p. 138.
- 32 Parikh, *Patel*, (1), p. 411.
- 33 Sitaramayya, *History*, (1), p. 600.
- 34 Tendulkar, *Mahatma*, (3), pp. 6-7.
- 35 *Young India*, 12.3.30, quoted in Hardiman, *Peasant Nationalists*, p. 191.
- 36 Parikh, *Patel*, (2), p. 7.
- 37 R. Gandhi, *Warrior*, p. 196.
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- 39 Desai in *Vir Vallabhbhai*, p. 51.
- 40 Parikh, *Patel*, (2), pp. 7-13; R. Patel, *Hind ke Sardar*, pp. 104-7; letter of 8.3.30 from Government of Bombay to Home Secretary, Government of India in File 22/20 of 1930, Home Pol., National Archives, New Delhi.
- 41 Report of Raojibhai Patel who, along with Darbar Gopaldas, supplied the account to Gandhi, as quoted in R. Patel, *Hind ke Sardar*, p. 107.
- 42 Parikh, *Patel*, (2), p. 8.
- 43 Mahadev Desai in *Young India*, 12.3.30, quoted in Parikh, *Patel*, (2), p. 10.

- 44 Article by Ravishankar in *Streejivan*, July 1975, reproduced in Shekhdiwala, (ed.), *Sardar*, p. 71.
- 45 Ibid., p. 70.
- 46 Ibid.
- 47 Parikh, *Patel*, (2), p. 30.
- 48 Patel's jail diary reproduced in Parikh, *Patel*, (2), pp. 14-30; last quote from Parikh, *Patel*, (2), p. 31.
- 49 R. Gandhi, *Warrior*, p. 198.
- 50 Brecher, *Nehru*, p. 153.
- 51 Hardiman, *Peasant Nationalists*, p. 197.
- 52 Alan Campbell-Johnson in his biography of Irwin, quoted in Brecher, *Nehru*, p. 153.
- 53 Parikh, *Patel*, (2), pp. 31-2.
- 54 Letter of 27.6.30, quoted in Hardiman, *Peasant Nationalists*, p. 206
- 55 Parikh, *Patel*, (2), pp. 33-4.
- 56 Ibid., p. 35.
- 57 Malaviya, 2.7.30, and Patel, 4.7.30, quoted in Parikh, *Patel*, (2), p. 35.
- 58 G. I. Patel, *Vithalbhai*, pp. 1138-9.
- 59 Parikh, *Patel*, (2), p. 35.
- 60 Incident recalled by Patel and quoted in Sitaramayya, *Feathers and Stones*, p. 213.
- 61 Police document of 13.9.30 quoted in Hardiman, *Peasant Nationalists*, p. 227.
- 62 Patel's words in *Borsad Satyagraha Samachar*, 21.9.30, quoted in Hardiman, *Peasant Nationalists*, p. 227.
- 63 Hardiman, *Peasant Nationalists*, pp. 227-8.
- 64 Hardiman, *Peasant Nationalists*, p. 227 and *Borsad Satyagraha Samachar*, 3.11.30, in Hardiman, *Peasant Nationalists*, p. 230.
- 65 Ibid., p. 231.
- 66 Parikh, *Patel*, (2), pp. 39-40.
- 67 Ibid., pp. 40-1.
- 68 Ibid., pp. 38-9.
- 69 Letter of 19.12.30 from Master quoted in Hardiman, *Peasant Nationalists*, p. 192.
- 70 R. Gandhi, *Warrior*, p. 215.
- 71 Tendulkar, *Mahatma*, (3), p. 62.
- 72 Sitaramayya, (1), p. 786.
- 73 Ibid., p. 743.
- 74 Ibid., p. 737.
- 75 Ibid.
- 76 Irwin (Halifax) in his *Fulness of Days*, pp. 146-51.
- 77 Quoted in Limaye, *Prime Movers*, p. 34.
- 78 Sitaramayya, *History*, (1), p. 753, and R. Gandhi, *Warrior*, p. 219.
- 79 Sitaramayya, *History*, (1), pp. 755-63.
- 80 G. I. Patel, *Vithalbhai*, pp. 1171-2.
- 81 Parikh, *Patel*, (2), p. 47.

- 82 Irwin (Halifax) in his *Fulness of Days*, pp. 146-51.
- 83 Parikh, *Patel*, (2), p. 51.
- 84 Ibid.
- 85 Ibid.
- 86 1930 remark quoted in article in *Vande Mataram*, Bombay, 31.10.45, reproduced in Shekhdiwala, (ed.), *Sardar*, p.106. Comment on Mafatlal in P. U. Patel, *Sardar Patel*, p. 136.
- 87 Parikh, *Patel*, (2), pp. 51-2.
- 88 Ibid., pp. 52-3.
- 89 Ibid., pp. 85-6.
- 90 Hardiman, *Peasant Nationalists*, p. 236.
- 91 Parikh, *Patel*, (2), p. 48.
- 92 Sitaramayya, *History*, (1), p. 747.
- 93 Hardiman, *Peasant Nationalists*, p. 237.
- 94 Parikh, *Patel*, (2), p. 57.
- 95 Ibid., p. 60.
- 96 R. Gandhi, *Warrior*, p.222.
- 97 Hardiman, *Peasant Nationalists*, pp. 237-8.
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- 99 Hardiman, *Peasant Nationalists*, p. 238.
- 100 "The Collector told Gandhiji that he would reinstate the mukhi." See Parikh, *Patel*, (2), p. 77.
- 101 Parikh, *Patel*, (2), p. 77.
- 102 Hardiman, *Peasant Nationalists*, p. 238.
- 103 Telegrams from 17-21.7.31, quoted in Parikh, *Patel*, (2), p. 67.
- 104 Parikh, *Patel*, (2), p. 66.
- 105 Ibid., p. 63.
- 106 Ibid., p. 68.
- 107 Tendulkar, *Mahatma*, (3), p. 138.
- 108 Parikh, *Patel*, (2), p. 72.
- 109 Letter of 26.10.31, Gandhi, *Letters*, p. 11.
- 110 R. Gandhi, *Warrior*, p. 226.
- 111 Ibid.
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- 113 Parikh, *Patel*, (2), p. 75.
- 114 Letter of 3.10.31 in File 243 of 1931, Home Pol., National Archives, New Delhi.
- 115 Parikh, *Patel*, (2), p. 79.
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- 119 Sitaramayya, *History*, (1), p. 864.
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- 122 Shah to author, Bardoli, 27.9.87.
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- 127 Parikh, *Patel*, (2), pp. 91-2.
- 128 Letter of 19.2.32 in Nandurkar, (ed.), *Sardarshri na Patro*, (3), pp. 34-5.
- 129 Nandurkar, (ed.), *Sardarshri na Patro*, (3), p. 39.
- 130 Letter to brother Somabhai's son Purshottam, 6.11.33, Nandurkar, (ed.), *Sardarshri ke Patra*, (2), p. 344.
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- 133 *Harijan*, 11.2.33.
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- 137 Letter in early May, 1933, to Sir Purshottamdas Thakurdas, Parikh, *Patel*, (2), pp. 134-5.
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- 140 Letter of 18.5.33, Devadas Gandhi Papers.
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- 143 Parikh, *Patel*, (2), pp. 137-8.
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- 150 Gandhi, *Letters*, pp. 13-4.
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- 152 *Ibid.*
- 153 G. I. Patel, *Vithalbhai*, pp. 1225-6.
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- 155 Parikh, *Patel*, (2), p. 147.
- 156 See Gandhi's letter to Patel of 28.10.33 in Gandhi, *Letters*, p. 22.
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FIVE/1934-39/BOSS

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SIX/1939-45/THWARTED

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- 80 Letter of 13.2.42 in *ibid.*, p. 252.
- 81 Letter of 4.10.41 in Nandurkar, (ed.), *Sardarshri ke Patra*, (2), p. 363.
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- 265 See Kripalani's Presidential address at Congress session, December 1946, in Kripalani, *Fateful Year*.
- 266 SWJN 13, pp. 584-7.
- 267 Ibid.
- 268 "...our leadership wearied of Satyagraha after it had developed a taste of power and cried 'never again' after the Quit India struggle." Pyarelal, "Gandhiji's Alter Ego", typescript, p. 37. Elucidating, Pyarelal told the present author in New Delhi in 1975 that the Sardar made the "never again" decision in Ahmednagar. See also Patel's letter to Manibehn, 22.5.45, in Nandurkar, (ed.), *Sardarshri ke Patra*, (2), pp. 392-3, and the Gandhi-Patel correspondence in July 1946 in Gandhi, *Letters*.
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SEVEN/1945-47/"VICTORY"

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- 14 Letter of 12.8.45 in Gandhi, *Letters*, p. 172.
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- 17 Letter of 12.8.45 in Gandhi, *Letters*, p. 172.
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- 27 On Aug. 24, 1945. Moon, (ed.), *Wavell*, p. 164.
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- 101 Moon, (ed.), *Wavell*, p. 303.
- 102 On 25.6.46. See *ibid.*, p. 491.
- 103 *Ibid.*, p. 305.
- 104 See Azad, *India Wins Freedom*, pp. 172-3 where he refers to his and Nehru's views; Moon, (ed.), *Wavell*, p. 258. and Durgadas, *India from Curzon to Nehru*, pp. 242-3, for Nehru's position; and R. Gandhi, *Rajaji*, p. 128, for Rajaji's.
- 105 On 2.6.46, to Vazirani. See SPC 3, p. 105.
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- 107 Patel to Wavell, 5.9.46, quoted in Moon, (ed.), *Wavell*, p. 347.
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- 109 To Vazirani, 12.6.46, in SPC 3, p. 108.
- 110 TOP 7, p. 884.
- 111 Moon, (ed.), *Wavell*, p. 292.
- 112 See Pethick-Lawrence to Attlee, 20.6.46, in TOP 7, p. 990.
- 113 See Pyarelal, *Last Phase*, (1), pp. 234-5. Azad's letter, which, according to Pyarelal, was referred to by Cripps and shown by Abell, the Viceroy's Secretary, to Amrit Kaur, does not find a place in the *Transfer of Power* volumes, but the account of the letter is consistent with, and probably the basis of, Pethick-Lawrence's categorical statement in TOP 7, p. 990.
- 114 See TOP 7, p. 973, and also Moon, (ed.), *Wavell*, p. 297.
- 115 Moon, (ed.), *Wavell*, p. 297.
- 116 Pyarelal, *Last Phase*, (1), p. 233.
- 117 Wavell to Azad, 21.6.46 is in TOP 7 and in Menon, *Transfer*, pp. 276-7.
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- 145 Kripalani to Durgadas, quoted by latter in *India from Curzon to Nehru*, p. 230.
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- 147 See remarks by Manibehn in SPC 10, p. xxxviii, and Durgadas, *India from Curzon to Nehru*, p. 230.
- 148 See SPC 10, p. xxxviii, and Durgadas, *India from Curzon to Nehru*, p. 230.
- 149 Kripalani, *Gandhi*, pp. 248-9.
- 150 This inference is based on DMP, entry of 16.9.48; Kripalani, *Gandhi*, pp. 248-9; and the April 1946 file of *Hindustan Times*.
- 151 Kripalani, *Gandhi*, pp. 248-9.
- 152 See Manibehn's remarks, SPC 10, p. xxxviii.
- 153 Entry for 16.9.48, DMP.
- 154 See Kripalani, *Gandhi*, pp. 248-9; SPC 10, p. xxxviii, and entry of 16.9.48, DMP.
- 155 Durgadas, *India from Curzon to Nehru*, p. 230.
- 156 Author's interviews with Goenka (Bombay, 17.4.87) and Masani (Bombay, 16.4.87). See also Brecher, *Nehru*, p. 315.

- 157 Morarji Desai and H. M. Patel, who saw Vallabhbhai often and at close quarters in 1946-50, to author, Bombay, 15.4.87, and Vallabh Vidya Nagar, 4.7.87, respectively.
- 158 Entry dated 3.5.46, DMP.
- 159 Kripalani, *Gandhi*, pp. 248-9.
- 160 Patel's remark to Manibehn relayed to author in Ahmedabad, April 1987, by Biharibhai Shah, who heard it from Manibehn.
- 161 *Hindustan Times*, 27.4.46.
- 162 *Hindustan Times*, 29.4.46.
- 163 Letter of 29.4.46 in File F4/33, Pyarelal Papers, New Delhi.
- 164 Letter of 29.4.46 in *ibid.*
- 165 Mishra, *Living an Era*, (2), pp. 185-6.
- 166 Gopal, *Nehru*, (1), p. 326.
- 167 Azad, *India Wins Freedom*, p. 155.
- 168 Taken from Brecher, *Nehru*, p. 316 and Menon, *Transfer*, p. 281.
- 169 Menon, *Transfer*, p. 281.
- 170 R. Gandhi, *Eight Lives*, p. 170.
- 171 SPC 3, pp. 153-4.
- 172 Azad, *India Wins Freedom*, pp. 154-5.
- 173 R. Gandhi, *Eight Lives*, p. 170.
- 174 Entry dated 29.7.46 in Moon, (ed.), *Wavell*, p. 324.
- 175 Wavell to Azad, 30.5.46, *ibid.*, p. 281.
- 176 On 23.7.46. Menon, *Transfer*, p. 286.
- 177 See entries dated 2.8.46 and 3.8.46, DMP, and Moon, (ed.), *Wavell*, p. 329.
- 178 Moon, (ed.), *Wavell*, p. 329.
- 179 Patel to D. P. Mishra, 20.7.46, in SPC 3, pp. 153-5.
- 180 *Ibid.*
- 181 Entry dated 2.9.46, DMP.
- 182 See Letters dated 19 to 23.8.46 from Patel to Gandhi in Nandurkar, (ed.), *Bapu, Sardar ane Mahadevbhai*, pp. 325-32.
- 183 Moon, (ed.), *Wavell*, p. 347.
- 184 On 4.2.47. *Ibid.*, p. 417.
- 185 *Ibid.*, p. 347.
- 186 *Ibid.*, pp. 346-7, and TOP 8, p. 419.
- 187 R. Gandhi, *Eight Lives*, p. 170.
- 188 Letter of 21.8.46 in SPC 3, p. 40.
- 189 Patel to Gandhi, 19.8.46, in Nandurkar, (ed.), *Bapu, Sardar ane Mahadevbhai*, p. 326.
- 190 On 11.9.46. Moon, (ed.), *Wavell*, p. 349.
- 191 See Gadgil, *Government from Inside*, p. 17.
- 192 See Abell to Wavell, 5.9.46, in TOP 8, p. 425.
- 193 On 24.10.46. TOP 8, p. 800.
- 194 On 24.10.46, *ibid.*
- 195 Pyarelal, *Last Phase*, (1), p. 287.
- 196 On 12.6.46. See Moon, (ed.), *Wavell*, p. 291.
- 197 *Ibid.*
- 198 Brecher, *Nehru*, p. 323.
- 199 Shankar, *Reminiscences*, (1), p. 27.

- 200 Diary entry dated 26.10.46, Moon, (ed.), *Wavell*, p. 365.
- 201 Entry dated 4.11.46, *ibid.*
- 202 Brecher, *Nehru*, p. 321.
- 203 See Patel to Gandhi, 20.8.46, in Nandurkar, (ed.), *Bapu, Sardar ane Mahadevbhai*, p. 328.
- 204 Shankar, *Reminiscences*, (1), p. 32.
- 205 Kripalani, *Fateful Year*, p. 31.
- 206 15.11.47, *ibid.*
- 207 Roy Bucher in Nandurkar, (ed.), *Centenary*, (1), p. 251.
- 208 Letter of 27.12.46 in Nandurkar, (ed.), *Bapu, Sardar ane Mahadevbhai*, p. 334.
- 209 Patel to Cripps, 15.12.46, in SPC 3, pp. 313-5.
- 210 Letter of 9.12.46 in Nandurkar, (ed.), *Bapu, Sardar ane Mahadevbhai*, p. 333.
- 211 Note dated 10.12.46 by Colville, TOP 9, pp. 322-3.
- 212 Brecher, *Nehru*, pp. 327-8.
- 213 TOP 9, pp. 322-3.
- 214 See Pyarelal, *Last Phase*, (1), p. 238.
- 215 Gandhi, *Letters*, pp. 183-4.
- 216 Nandurkar, (ed.), *Bapu, Sardar ane Mahadevbhai*, p. 316.
- 217 *Ibid.*, p. 333.
- 218 Brecher, *Nehru*, p. 325.
- 219 A. Clow, Acting Governor of Bombay, to Colville, Acting Viceroy, 4.12.46, in TOP 9, p. 252.
- 220 Patel quoted in TOP 9, p. 181.
- 221 Entry dated 2.1.47, DMP.
- 222 Gandhi, *Letters*, pp. 205-6. See also Pyarelal, *Last Phase*, (1), pp. 488-9.
- 223 Nandurkar, (ed.), *Bapu, Sardar ane Mahadevbhai*, pp. 336-7.
- 224 See Wavell to Burrows, Governor of Bengal, 14.1.47, in TOP 9, p. 499 and Pyarelal, *Last Phase*, (1), pp. 480-2.
- 225 Brecher, *Nehru*, p. 332.
- 226 On 15.2.47. Quoted in Pyarelal, *Last Phase*, (1), p. 564.
- 227 Brecher, *Nehru*, pp. 334-5.
- 228 On 24.2.47. Pyarelal, *Last Phase*, (1), p. 565.
- 229 Menon, *Transfer*, pp. 358-9.
- 230 Patel to Cripps, 15.12.46, SPC 3, p. 315.
- 231 Menon, *Transfer*, p. 359.
- 232 *Ibid.*, pp. 358-9.
- 233 *Ibid.*
- 234 See Patel to Nehru, 11.11.46 in SPC 7, p. 11.
- 235 See letters from Birla to Cripps in Birla, *Shadow*, pp. 290-1, and letter from Birla to Alexander in TOP 9, p. 390.
- 236 Colville to Pethick-Lawrence, 18.12.46, TOP 9, p. 380.
- 237 See entries for Dec. 15, 16 and 17 in DMP.
- 238 Smith's account in TOP 9, p. 544.
- 239 Moon, (ed.), *Wavell*, p. 378.
- 240 TOP 9, p. 358.
- 241 *Ibid.*, pp. 431-3.

- 242 Patel to Wavell, 17.2.47, in Moon, (ed.), *Wavell*, p. 421.
- 243 Ibid., p. 462.
- 244 Moon's comment in *ibid.*, p. 462.
- 245 SPC 3, p. 314.
- 246 Moon, (ed.), *Wavell*, p. 429.
- 247 *Hindustan Times*, 7.3.47.
- 248 The thousand figure is given in Moon, (ed.), *Wavell*, p. 427. In a letter to Gandhi, 24.3.47, Patel said: "50,000 probably may have been killed." Nandurkar, (ed.), *Bapu, Sardar ane Mahadevbhai*, p. 342.
- 249 Menon, *Transfer*, p. 347.
- 250 See *Hindustan Times*, 9.3.47.
- 251 Entry for 7.3.47, DMP.
- 252 Wavell to Pethick-Lawrence, 12.3.47, TOP 9, p. 926.
- 253 Gandhi, *Letters*, pp. 212-3.
- 254 Nandurkar, (ed.), *Bapu, Sardar ane Mahadevbhai*, p. 342.
- 255 Letter from Patel to Dwarkadas in Dwarkadas, *Ten Years to Freedom*, pp. 207-8.
- 256 Gandhi, *Letters*, p. 203.
- 257 Ibid., pp. 210-1.
- 258 Campbell-Johnson, *Mission with Mountbatten*, p. 46.
- 259 Patel's Note of 11.12.46 in TOP 9, p. 340.
- 260 Campbell-Johnson, *Mission with Mountbatten*, p. 47.
- 261 Letter of 24.3.47 in Nandurkar, (ed.), *Bapu, Sardar ane Mahadevbhai*, p. 342.
- 262 Mountbatten's record of interview, TOP 10, P. 69.
- 263 Pyarelal, (2), p. 80.
- 264 Menon, *Transfer*, p. 352.
- 265 Mountbatten's record of interview, TOP 10, p. 73.
- 266 Mountbatten's record of interview, TOP 10, p. 84.
- 267 Ibid.
- 268 Mountbatten's record of interview, TOP 10, p. 86.
- 269 Campbell-Johnson, *Mission with Mountbatten*, p. 57.
- 270 Menon's criticism, TOP 10, pp. 122-5; suggestion on tactics, *ibid.*, p. 129.
- 271 See entries for April 7, 8 and 9, DMP.
- 272 TOP 10, pp. 185-8.
- 273 Pyarelal, *Last Phase*, (2), pp. 84-5.
- 274 Ibid.
- 275 See opinion of Chaudhri Muhammad Ali in R. Gandhi, *Eight Lives*, p. 174.
- 276 Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 174.
- 277 Quoted in paper by B. R. Nanda in Phillips and Wainwright, (ed.), *Partition of India*, p. 185.
- 278 TOP 10, p. 234.
- 279 TOP 10, p. 265fn.
- 280 Letter of 16.4.47 in TOP 10, pp. 267-8.
- 281 On 25.4.47. See Top 10, p. 426.
- 282 On 24.4.47. Ibid., p. 398.

- 283 See Abell to Wavell, 5.9.46, TOP 8, p. 425.
- 284 See Mountbatten to Secretary of State, Listowel, 24.4.47, TOP 10, p. 400.
- 285 TOP 10, pp. 398-9.
- 286 See Patel to Henderson, 16.4.47, TOP 10, p. 268.
- 287 TOP 10, p. 426.
- 288 Ibid.
- 289 TOP 10, pp. 445-8.
- 290 Menon, *Transfer*, p. 354.
- 291 Ibid., p. 355.
- 292 TOP 10, pp. 716-7.
- 293 Brecher, *Nehru*, p. 329.
- 294 Shankar, *Reminiscences*, (1), p. 52.
- 295 Gopal, *Nehru*, (1), p. 346.
- 296 TOP 10, pp. 716-7.
- 297 Mountbatten to his staff, 10.5.47, in TOP 10, p. 729.
- 298 See telegram of 8.5.47 from Simla, TOP 10, p. 699.
- 299 "At night Menon phoned from Simla"—entry dated 9.5.47, DMP.
- 300 Foregoing based on DMP; Menon, *Transfer*, pp. 359-62; Shankar, *Reminiscences*, (1), pp. 57-8; TOP 10, pp. 699, 729-30; H. M. Patel to author, Vallabh Vidya Nagar, 4.7.87. According to Shankar, he was the middleman in the phone conversation; the line was bad and neither Patel nor Nehru could hear each other but they could hear Shankar. The latter's account has been slightly amended here in the light of H. M. Patel's statement to author.
- 301 Letter of 17.5.47 in TOP 10, p. 870.
- 302 Ibid., p. 778.
- 303 Campbell-Johnson, *Mission with Mountbatten*, p. 93.
- 304 Letter of 16.5.47 in Nandurkar, (ed.), *Bapu, Sardar ane Mahadevbhai*, p. 344.
- 305 Letter of 16.5.47, Gandhi, *Letters*, pp. 213-4.
- 306 *Hindustan Times*, 12.5.47.
- 307 CWMG 88, p. 61.
- 308 Pyarelal, *Last Phase*, (2), p. 211.
- 309 H. M. Patel to author, 29.4.87, New Delhi.
- 310 *Hindustan Times*, 10.6.47.
- 311 CWMG 88, p. 394.
- 312 Pyarelal, *Last Phase*, (2), p. 211.
- 313 Ibid., p. 252.
- 314 Lohia, *Guilty Men*, pp. 20-2.
- 315 TOP 11, p. 158.
- 316 Pyarelal, *Last Phase*, (2), p. 205.
- 317 Top 11, p. 47.
- 318 Menon, *Transfer*, p. 382.
- 319 Pyarelal, *Last Phase*, (2), p. 252.
- 320 Gadgil, *Government from Inside*, p. 30.
- 321 Brecher, *Nehru*, p. 349.
- 322 Menon, *Transfer*, p. 385; Pyarelal, *Last Phase*, (2), pp. 254-5.

- 323 Gadgil, *Government from Inside*, p. 40.
- 324 See Hodson, *Great Divide*, pp. 284-5; Gopal, *Nehru*, (1), p. 352; and Nehru's remarks quoted in Pyarelal, *Last Phase*, (2), p. 270.
- 325 Pyarelal, *Last Phase*, (2), p. 270.
- 326 See *ibid.*, p. 268.
- 327 *Hindustan Times*, 16.7.48.
- 328 See M. Yunus, *Persons, Passions and Politics*, Vikas, New Delhi, 1980, p. 95.
- 329 Pyarelal, *Last Phase*, (2), pp. 13-5.
- 330 *Ibid.*, p. 257.
- 331 Lohia, *Guilty Men*, p. 21.
- 332 Shankar, *Reminiscences*, (1), p. 73.
- 333 See Patel to B. L. Mitter about the Gujarat States, Nandurkar, (ed.), *Centenary*, (4), p. 255; Patel to Nehru about Hyderabad and Bastar, 11.11.46, SPC 7, p. 11; Patel to Munshi about States in general, 7.12.46, in Munshi, *Pilgrimage*; and Patel to Gandhi about Kashmir, 21.4.47, in Nandurkar, (ed.), *Bapu, Sardar and Mahadevbhai*, p. 343.
- 334 On 11.8.47. See Gandhi, *Letters*, p. 200.
- 335 TOP 11, p. 134.
- 336 On 27.6.47. See TOP 11, pp. 687-9.
- 337 Memorandum of 12.5.47 by Cabinet Mission to Chancellor of Chamber of Princes embodying (according to HMG's statement of June 3, 1947) Britain's policy towards the States. Menon, *States*, p. 498.
- 338 Menon, *States*, pp. 90-1.
- 339 For date of Patel-Corfield meeting see Patel to K. M. Panikkar, 23.5.47, SPC 7, p. 30. For Patel's remarks to Corfield see Menon, *States*, pp. 155-6.
- 340 Menon, *States*, p. 91.
- 341 On 13.6.47. TOP 11, pp. 321-3.
- 342 Hodson, *Great Divide*, p. 375.
- 343 *Ibid.*, p. 361.
- 344 TOP 11, p. 688.
- 345 See Munshi, *Pilgrimage*, p. 379, and Menon, *States*, pp. 116-7.
- 346 Hodson, *Great Divide*, p. 379, and Menon, *States*, pp. 116-7.
- 347 See Hodson, *Great Divide*, p. 380. Hodson's account is based on what Hanwant Singh told Mountbatten and Menon on, most probably, 11.8.47. TOP 12, p. 661, and Menon, *States*, pp. 116-8, help to fix the date.
- 348 Menon, *States*, p. 94.
- 349 See Shankar, *Reminiscences*, (1), p. 74; R. Patel, *Hind ke Sardar*, p. 164; and p. of this work.
- 350 Shankar, *Reminiscences*, (1), p. 74.
- 351 *Ibid.*, pp. 74-5.
- 352 See letters from B. L. Mitter to Patel on 22.11.46 and 14.5.47 in Nandurkar, (ed.), *Centenary*, (4 & 5), pp. 256-7 and p. 19 respectively.
- 353 Hodson, *Great Divide*, p. 366.

- 354 Menon, *States*, pp. 96-7.
- 355 Hodson, *Great Divide*, p. 366.
- 356 Ibid., p. 356.
- 357 Menon, *States*, p. 476.
- 358 Ibid., p. 98.
- 359 See V. P. Menon to C. P. Ramaswami Aiyer, 14.7.47, TOP 12, pp. 148-9.
- 360 Moon, (ed.), *Wavell*, p. 475.
- 361 Menon, *States*, pp. 92-3.
- 362 Ibid., p. 113.
- 363 Ibid., p. 94.
- 364 Hodson, *Great Divide*, p. 368.
- 365 From Menon, *States*, pp. 99-100, and paper by E.W.R. Lumby in Phillips and Wainwright, (ed.), *Partition of India*, p. 103.
- 366 Menon, *States*, p. 113, and Hodson, *Great Divide*, p. 368.
- 367 Hodson, *Great Divide*, pp. 367-8. According to Hodson, both Mountbatten and Menon confirmed the veracity of this conversation.
- 368 Ibid., p. 372.
- 369 Ibid., pp. 373-4.
- 370 Ibid., p. 331.
- 371 Ibid., p. 377.
- 372 Menon, *States*, p. 122.
- 373 Hodson, *Great Divide*, p. 374.
- 374 Menon, *States*, pp. 121-2.
- 375 TOP 12, p. 672.
- 376 Menon, *States*, pp. 118-9.
- 377 TOP 12, pp. 554-5.
- 378 Ibid.
- 379 Ibid., p. 506.
- 380 "I attach a copy of the instrument of accession, which V. P. Menon has drafted" – Mountbatten in his Personal Report of 25.7.47, TOP 12, p. 338.
- 381 TOP 12, pp. 507-8.
- 382 Hodson, *Great Divide*, p. 377.
- 383 Record of the 11.8.47 interview between Mountbatten and Bhopal in TOP 12, pp. 600-1.
- 384 Menon, *States*, pp. 116-7.
- 385 TOP 12, pp. 600-1.
- 386 Menon, *States*, pp. 117-8.
- 387 Ibid., p. 112.
- 388 Munshi, *Pilgrimage*, p. 131.
- 389 H. M. Patel in Nandurkar, (ed.), *Centenary*, (1), pp. 141-2.
- 390 Mountbatten's Personal Report, 27.6.47, TOP 12, p. 682.
- 391 Durgadas, *From Curzon to Nehru*, p. 230.
- 392 Nehru quoted in A. M. Khan, *Leader by Merit*, p. 295.
- 393 Nehru's broadcast, 31.12.50, in Nandurkar, (ed.), *Centenary*, (1), p. 448.
- 394 Mountbatten's Personal Report, 1.8.47, TOP 12, p. 451.

- 395 Ibid.
- 396 CWMG 88, p. 408.
- 397 This inference is supported by Para 39 of Mountbatten's Personal Report of 1.8.47, TOP 12, p. 452.
- 398 See *ibid.*, Paras 37 & 39.
- 399 See C.R.'s speech in Shilong published in *Hindustan Times*, 27.11.49.
- 400 See Gandhi-Patel correspondence, July-Aug. 1947, Gandhi, *Letters*, pp. 186-94.
- 401 Gadgil, *Government from Inside*, pp. 21-2.
- 402 Hodson, *Great Divide*, p. 337.
- 403 *Ibid.*, p. 338.
- 404 *Ibid.*, pp. 344-5.
- 405 *Ibid.*
- 406 See Shankar, *Reminiscences*, (1), p. 56, and TOP 11, pp. 263-5.
- 407 Hodson, *Great Divide*, p. 349.
- 408 Patel to Mountbatten, 13.8.47, TOP 12, pp. 692-3.
- 409 Burrows to Mountbatten, quoted in Hodson, *Great Divide*, p. 350.
- 410 Nandurkar, (ed.), *Bapu, Sardar ane Mahadevbhai*, p. 345.
- 411 Patel to Hariprasad Desai, 8.8.47, Nandurkar, (ed.), *Post-centenary*, (1), p. 4.

EIGHT/1947- 48/CLIMAX

- 1 Menon, *Transfer*, p. 431.
- 2 TOP 12, p. 739.
- 3 *Hindustan Times*, 19.6.47.
- 4 TOP 12, p. 739.
- 5 Decision of Emergency Committee of Govt. of India cited in Hodson, *Great Divide*, pp. 410-1.
- 6 *Hindustan Times*, 15.10.47.
- 7 Entry dated 21.9.47, DMP.
- 8 Letter of 2.9.47 in SPC 4, pp. 321-4.
- 9 Sucheta Kripalani in Nandurkar, (ed.), *Centenary*, (1), p. 388.
- 10 SPC 4, pp. 318-9.
- 11 Nehru to Patel, 2.9.47, and enclosure, SPC 4, pp. 319-20.
- 12 Campbell-Johnson, *Mission with Mountbatten*, p. 189.
- 13 Letter of 30.8.47 in Pyarelal, *Last Phase*, (2), p. 394.
- 14 Letter of 1.9.47 in SPC 4, pp. 314-5.
- 15 Letter of 13.8.47 in Nandurkar, (ed.), *Bapu, Sardar ane Mahadevbhai*, p. 345.
- 16 On 7.9.47. See Campbell-Johnson, *Mission with Mountbatten*, p. 182.
- 17 *Hindustan Times*, 8.9.47.
- 18 *Hindustan Times*, 11.9.47.
- 19 Letter of 27.8.47 in Nandurkar, (ed.), *Bapu, Sardar ane Mahadevbhai*, p. 348.
- 20 Pyarelal, *Last Phase*, (2), p. 431.

- 21 Menon, *Transfer*, p. 425. Date from DMP.
- 22 DMP.
- 23 CWMG 89, p. 181.
- 24 Mountbatten in *Listener*, 30.10.75, quoted in Gopal, *Nehru*, (2), p. 18fn.
- 25 K. Santhanam in Nandurkar, (ed.), *Centenary*, (1), p. 323.
- 26 Shankar, *Reminiscences*, (1), p. 110.
- 27 Entry dated 14.9.47, DMP.
- 28 Shankar, *Reminiscences*, pp. 102-3.
- 29 Ibid.
- 30 Entry dated 30.9.47, DMP.
- 31 Shankar, *Reminiscences*, (1), pp. 104-5.
- 32 See *Hindustan Times*, 27.9.47.
- 33 *Hindustan Times*, 12.10.47.
- 34 Gandhi to Delhi Muslims, *Harijan*, 28.9.47.
- 35 Entry dated 2.10.47, DMP.
- 36 On 19.9.87. CWMG 89, p. 198.
- 37 SPC 4, pp. 360-6.
- 38 Patel to Nehru, 12.10.47, and Nehru to Patel, 12.10.47, in SPC 4, pp. 299-304. Azad's demand for Randhawa's transfer recalled by Patel, 25.5.50, DMP.
- 39 See entry of 7.10.47, DMP, and Gandhi to Patel, 6.10.47, in Gandhi, *Letters*, p. 227.
- 40 SPC 4, pp. 376-80; also Shankar, *Reminiscences*, (1), p. 109.
- 41 Pyarelal, *Last Phase*, (2), p. 460.
- 42 Gandhi to Patel, 1.11.47, in Gandhi, *Letters*, p. 227.
- 43 Nandurkar, (ed.), *Bapu, Sardar ane Mahadevbhai*, p. 349.
- 44 Shankar, *Reminiscences*, (1), pp. 115-6.
- 45 Hodson, *Great Divide*, p. 383.
- 46 Menon, *States*, p. 396.
- 47 Entry of 29.9.47, DMP.
- 48 Hodson, *Great Divide*, p. 383.
- 49 Shankar, *Reminiscences*, p. 127.
- 50 Menon, *States*, p. 395.
- 51 Ibid., p. 128.
- 52 Hodson, *Great Divide*, p. 436.
- 53 See Patel's speech in Junagadh, 13.11.47, in Nandurkar, (ed.), *Centenary*, (2), p. 68.
- 54 Menon, *States*, pp. 142-3.
- 55 Ibid., p. 144.
- 56 Quote from Ismay, who was also at dinner. Hodson, *Great Divide*, p. 439.
- 57 *Hindustan Times*, 14.11.47.
- 58 Nandurkar, (ed.), *Centenary*, (2), p. 62.
- 59 Nandurkar, (ed.), *Centenary*, (2), p. 64, and Menon, *States*, p. 147.
- 60 Menon, *States*, p. 149.
- 61 Pradyumnasinh to Patel, 11.11.47, in Nandurkar, (ed.), *Centenary*, (5), p. 28.

- 62 Menon, *States*, pp. 147-8.
- 63 CWMG 90, p.127. See also Gadgil, *Government from Inside*, pp.184-5, and Munshi, *Pilgrimage*, pp. 287, 559-60.
- 64 Munshi, *Pilgrimage*, p. 565.
- 65 SPC 1, p. 37.
- 66 Jinnah's remarks to Mountbatten, Lahore, 1.11.47, in SPC 1, p. 74.
- 67 See Patel to K. C. Neogy, 17.9.47; Patel to Dy. Prime Minister of Kashmir (telegram), 28.9.47; Kidwai to Patel, 3.10.47; Patel to Kidwai, 4.10.47. All in SPC 1, pp. 39-49.
- 68 Mahajan, *Looking Back*, p. 126.
- 69 SPC 1, p. 40.
- 70 Patel to Hari Singh, 2.10.47, SPC 1, p. 42.
- 71 SPC 1, p. 45.
- 72 On 2.10.47. SPC 1, pp. 42-3.
- 73 Patel to Mahajan, 21.10.47, SPC 1, pp. 61-2.
- 74 Menon, *States*, p. 396.
- 75 SPC 1, p. 63.
- 76 R. Gandhi, *Eight Lives*, p. 181.
- 77 Hodson, *Great Divide*, pp. 445-7.
- 78 Ibid., p. 447.
- 79 See Mishra, *Living an Era*, (2), p. 25.
- 80 See Appendix I in Prasad and Pal, *Operations in Jammu and Kashmir*.
- 81 Hodson, *Great Divide*, p. 447.
- 82 Campbell-Johnson, *Mission with Mountbatten*, p. 229.
- 83 Menon, *States*, p. 415.
- 84 Ibid., p. 397.
- 85 Entry dated 25.10.47, DMP.
- 86 Gopal, *Nehru*, (2), p. 19.
- 87 Hodson, *Great Divide*, p. 450.
- 88 Ibid., p. 398.
- 89 Mahajan, *Looking Back*, p. 151.
- 90 Ibid., p. 152.
- 91 Karan Singh, *Heir Apparent*, p. 59.
- 92 Menon, *States*, p. 402.
- 93 Menon's statement in *States* that Patel met him at the airport on the 26th is incorrect. Manibehn's entry for 26.10.47 has Menon coming to 1 Aurangzeb Road "straight from the airport"; on the 27th she records her father going to the airport.
- 94 Hodson, *Great Divide*, p. 457.
- 95 See Shankar, *Reminiscences*, (1), p. 132, and Menon, *States*, p. 406.
- 96 Entry dated 4.11.47, DMP.
- 97 *Hindustan Times*, 18.12.50.
- 98 Menon, *States*, p. 406.
- 99 Quoted in R. Gandhi, *Eight Lives*, p. 182. See also Shankar, *Reminiscences*, p. 133, and Prasad and Pal, *Operations in Jammu and Kashmir*.

- 100 Gadgil, *Government from Inside*, pp. 63-4.
- 101 Letter of 7.11.47 in SPC 1, p. 87.
- 102 Ibid., p. 96.
- 103 Ibid., p. 105.
- 104 Letter of 10.12.47 in SPC 1, p. 111.
- 105 Shankar, *Reminiscences*, (1), p. 136
- 106 Letter of 22.12.47. SPC 1, pp. 118-9.
- 107 Ibid., p. 119.
- 108 Ibid., p. 120.
- 109 Letter of 23.12.47. SPC 1, pp. 121-2.
- 110 Ibid., p. 122.
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NINE / 1948-50 / SOLDIER

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INDEX

- Abdullah, Sheikh, 434-5, 439-40, 442-6, 449, 517
- Abell, George, 394, 398
- Accession of states, 145, 178, 405-15, 433-58, 475-85, 500-1
- Africa, 149
- Aga Khan, 351
- Ahimsa, 70, 102, 232, 293-4, 296, 304, 319, 383-4
- Aiyar, Alladi Kirshnaswami, 500
- Aiyar, C. P. Ramaswami, 407
- Ahmedabad municipality, 7, 134-5, 137
- Ahmedabad school teachers' agitation, 99-100, 104, 133, 134
- Ahmedabad textile mill's strike (1918), 55-8, 63-4, 69, 130
- Ahmedabad Textile Labour Union, 58
- Akalis, 351
- Akola jail, 114, 115
- Alexander, A. V., 357, 386
- Ali, Aruna Asaf, 354, 355, 356
- Ali, Asaf, 310, 320, 326, 347, 349, 375, 377, 379
- Ali, Chaudhri Muhammad, 416, 441, 445
- Ali, Laik, 477, 478, 479, 481
- Ali, Muhammad, 65, 69, 81, 82, 92-8, 117-8, 131, 146, 172, 224
- Ali, Shaukat, 65, 69, 81, 82, 92-6, 145-6, 159, 224; on Patel, 23
- 'Aliya', 119-24
- All India States Peoples Conference, 406
- All Parties Conference, Bombay, 102
- Alva, Joachim, 302
- Ambedkar, B. R., 209, 228-30, 417, 462, 500, 504
- Amery, Leopold, 323
- Anand, Swami, 37, 137, 155, 167, 238, 380
- Anderson, F. G. H., 150, 157, 168, 170
- Andrews, C. F., 93
- Aney, M. S., 248, 271, 327
- Ansari, M. A., 182, 200, 209, 213, 248, 251, 352
- Anthony, Frank, 500
- Arzi Hukumat, 436, 437, 438
- Asar, Laxmidas, 145
- Atlantic Charter, 300
- Attlee, C. R., 284, 347, 357, 381, 385, 387-9, 403, 509
- Auchinleck, Claud, 444
- Ayyangar, Ananthasayanam, 501
- Ayyangar, N. Gopalaswami, 446-9, 458-9, 475, 478, 500, 517
- Azad, Abul Kalam, 88, 90, 97, 117, 182, 184, 246, 261-2, 277, 279, 284, 292-3, 300, 307, 309, 313, 321, 324, 326, 344-6, 392-4, 404, 466, 472, 498, 503, 504, 517, 522, 526-8, 531, 533; relations with Patel, 267, 278, 294, 302, 306, 310, 312, 316-7, 320, 322, 327-33, 335-7, 347-52, 357-8, 362, 364, 366-9, 371, 378-9, 389, 402-3, 417-8, 426, 431-2, 448, 458, 465, 503, 522, 527, 533; on Patel, 48, 113, 349
- 'Babar Deva', 119-24
- Bahadurji, D. N., 260
- Bajaj, Jamnalal, 114-8, 147, 148, 253; relations with Patel, 118, 255-6, 271, 303
- Bajaj, Jankidevi, 148, 238, 303
- Bajpai, G. S., 511
- Banker, Shankerlal, 55, 57, 75, 106, 145
- Baraiyas, 120, 124, 125
- Bardoli (land revenue) satyagraha, 95-6, 102-5, 142, 145, 149-73, 178, 180, 183-5, 187, 193, 260, 292, 380, 422, 460, 492
- Bardoloi, Gopinath, 259, 277, 310
- Bari, Maulana Abdul, 98, 316
- Batlivala, S. S., 263
- Bavazir, Imam Saheb Abdul Kader, 154, 161
- Beaumont, Sir John, 237
- Belgaum Jail, 225, 238, 240, 298
- Bengal famine, 330, 344

- Benjamin, Solomon, 199
Besant, Annie, 38, 40, 65, 72, 81-2, 88, 90
Bevin, Ernest, 387
Bhabha, C. H., 375, 417, 428
Bhadrapur, K. B., 207
Bhagat, Ishwarlal, 141, 142
Bhajanavali, 190
Bhandari, M. G., Lt. Col., 322
Bhargava, Gopichand, 516, 520
Bhatt, Nanabhai, 276
Bhatt, Ramchandra, 167
Bhave, Vinoba, 115, 117, 296
Bhoodan, 115
Bhutto, Sir Shah Nawaz, 435, 437
Bihar earthquake (1934), 238-9
Billimoria, 187-9
Billimoria, D. C., 192
Birdwood, Sir William, 195
Birkenhead, Lord, 105
Birlas, 253
Birla, B. M., 313
Birla, G. D., 147, 251, 253, 274, 290, 299, 380, 386-9, 400, 466, 472-3, 490, 516, 531, 532; relations with Patel, 255, 301, 350, 467, 473, 526
Birla, R. D., 253, 290, 299, 313, 533
Birla House, 315, 316, 366, 428, 433, 462, 464, 466-8, 526, 532
Biyani, Brijlal, 271
Bombay Chronicle, 62, 72, 75, 98, 217
Bombay Jail, 334
Bombay Legislative Council, 150, 157, 161, 163
Bombay Presidency Land League, 170
Bomford, Hugh, 269
Bonded labour, 145
Borsad (anti-dacoity cess) satyagraha, 119-24, 133-4, 142, 154, 187; Gandhi on, 129-30
Bose, Nandalal, 264
Bose, Subhas Chandra, 91, 97, 132, 168, 171-2, 181, 184-5, 205, 226, 235, 254, 265, 270, 283, 292-4, 300, 307, 311-2, 348, 441; relationship with Patel, 181, 236, 237, 240, 264, 277-82
Bose, Sarat, 237, 280-1, 344, 348-9, 375, 377, 418
Boycott of foreign goods, 93, 110, 210
Boycott of legislatures, 25, 111-12, 118, 130, 133, 146, 230, 241, 245, 246
Brabourne, Lord, 269
Brecher, M., 182, 354n
Brij Krishna, 467, 472
Broomfield, Robert S., 106, 168, 170, 349
Buch, N. M., 437
Bucher, Roy, Gen., 380, 468, 474-5, 479, 482
Burma, 233
Cabinet Mission, 354-69, 386, 394, 396, 403-4, 409
Cadell, Sir Patrick, 272-4
Candy, Maj. Gen., 322
Caveeshar, Sardul Singh, 166, 213, 412
Central Emergency Committee, 429
Chamberlain, Neville, 293
Champaran, 39, 40, 42-6, 48, 68-9, 72, 309
Chand Bibi, 319
Charotar, 4-6
Chatfield, 78, 80, 141
Chaudhuri, J. N., Maj. Gen., 483
Chauri Chaura, 103-5, 113, 187, 309
Chelmsford, Lord, 65, 69, 88, 91, 95
Chetty, Shanmukham, 417, 463
Chiang Kai-shek, 303, 305, 333
China, 509-13, 529-30
Chinai, 136
Chirol, Valentine, 81
Choksi, Bhogilal, 120
Chou En-lai, 510
Churchill, Winston, 199, 201, 226, 293, 300, 305, 316, 318, 326-7, 330-1, 336, 343, 347, 449
Civil disobedience, 75, 111-3, 185, 194, 199, 206, 212, 232-4, 240, 242, 245, 246, 292, 296, 300, 314
Civil services, 501-2
Clarke, Charles A., 115-6
Collins, S. J. S., 211
Colville, 381, 387
Commonwealth, 399, 507
Communal Award, 220, 227, 249
Communalism, *see* Hindu-Muslim problem
Communists, 263, 265, 315, 356, 518
Congress, *see* Indian National Congress
Congress Democratic Party, 185
Congress Socialist Party, 240, 245, 247, 249
Constitution of India, 504
Constituent Assembly, 380, 384, 396, 399, 421, 470, 474, 499, 501, 504, 517
Corfield, Sir Conrad, 407, 411
Cox, A. R., 206
Craik, Sir Henry, 251
Cripps, Sir Stafford, 305-7, 309, 312, 333,

- 347, 357, 358, 360-2, 365-9, 374, 377,
381-2, 386, 388, 391
Crump, Justice, 135
Cunningham, Sir George, 441
- Daily Telegraph, 438
Dain, J. R., 266
Dalai Lama, 510, 513
Das, Biswanath, 259, 310, 348
Das, C. R., 74, 82, 88, 90, 95, 97, 101-4,
111-4, 131-4, 146, 219, 224, 237
Das, P. R., 237
Dave, Jugatram, 154
Davis, Godfrey, 30, 36, 168, 190
Dawn, 499
Delhi Emergency Committee, 428
Deo, Shankarrao, 260, 310, 320, 323-7,
330, 339, 343, 347, 417-8, 521-5
Desai, Bhaktiba, 147, 154, 163, 166
Desai, Bhulabhai, 210-1, 236-7, 308, 310,
320, 344, 363; relations with Patel,
249, 297, 337-9, 349, 352
Desai, Chandulal, 234, 249
Desai, Chhotubhai, 156, 158
Desai, Dayaljibhai, 150
Desai, Doongerbhai, 3, 6, 10-13
Desai, Durgabehn, 321
Desai, Hitendra, 291, 348, 515
Desai, Jivanji, 251
Desai, Kanjibhai, 291, 348, 515
Desai, Kanu, 264
Desai, Krishnalal, 54, 59
Desai, Mahadev, 24, 37, 64-6, 73, 76-7,
101, 143, 161, 167-8, 191, 212, 214,
231-3, 246, 253, 255, 283, 296, 308,
313, 317, 340, 343-4, 515; relations of,
with Patel, 46-7, 59, 70-2, 113-4,
116-8, 125, 127, 129, 132, 137, 144-6,
157-8, 164, 166, 178, 186, 188-90, 208,
213-9, 221, 223, 226-31, 234, 245,
256, 273, 281-2, 292, 294, 297-8
301-4, 316, 320-2; on Patel, 180, 188-9
Desai, Morarji, 141-2, 249, 267, 297-9,
380, 515-6, 529, 532
Deshmukh, R. M., 269
Deshpande, Gangadharrao, 179, 260
de Valera, Eamon, 235
Dev, Narendra, 181, 245, 254, 310, 320,
323, 474
Dewan, H. L., 141, 142
Dharmendrasinh, Thakore, 272-6
Dhebar, U. N., 272-3, 314
Dhruva, Anandshankar, 58
Diary (of Edwin Montagu), 242
Direct Action day, 373, 376, 388
Discovery of India, 323
Diwakar, R. R., 316
Doulatram, Jairamdas, 310
Dowry, 143-4, 147
Doyle, Col., 228
Dudhabhai, 144
Dutt, B. C., 354, 355
Dwarkadas, Kanji, 390
Dyer, Reginald, Gen., 79, 86-7
- Economist*, 513
Edwardes, M., 354n
Elwin, Verrier, 212
Emerson, H. W., 194, 211
Emma Hamilton, 190
Engineer, N. P., 363, 364
Erskine, Lord, 285
- Feathers and Stones*, 323
Federal Scheme, 279
First World War, 43
Fischer, Louis, 352
Flag satyagraha, (Nagpur), 114-6, 127,
187, 292, 492
Forbes, Alexander, 5
Forward Bloc, 283
Free Press Journal, 356
- Gadgil, N. V., 343, 417-8, 438, 445, 462,
532
Gagalbhai, Mafatlal, 203
Gait, Sir Edward, 42
Gandhi, Abha, 467
Gandhi, Devadas, 84, 113-4, 118, 146,
232, 265, 322, 389, 429, 468, 473
Gandhi, Indira, 315, 400, 472
Gandhi, Karamchand, 274
Gandhi, Kasturba, 74, 139, 148, 190, 212,
223-4, 228-9, 232-3, 239-40, 274-5,
313, 330, 343
Gandhi, Maganlal, 163, 217
Gandhi, Mahatma, 24, 27, 36-45, 53-5,
65, 127, 129, 130, 142, 154, 166, 185,
199, 278; relations with Patel, 36-7,
39, 40-2, 45-9, 68, 70-8, 81, 89, 95,
102-6, 113, 130, 139-40, 143-7, 150-1,
158, 162, 164, 166-7, 169, 171-2, 177,
179-80, 183-4, 186, 188, 193-4, 199,
202-5, 210, 212, 214, 216-24, 226-34,
236, 239, 241, 245-6, 251, 253, 258,
263-4, 266, 273, 275-6, 280, 291-6,
298-303, 306, 308-18, 321, 330, 336,
340, 344-50, 355-6, 362, 364, 366, 367,

- 371, 375, 390-2, 400-2, 405, 421, 427,
431-3, 438, 448, 454, 458, 462-72, 492,
515, 527
- Gandhi, Manilal, 192
- Gandhi, Manu, 469
- Gandhi, Ramdas, 155, 238
- Gandhi, Samaldas, 436-8
- Gandhi-Irwin talks, 199-202, 204-6, 224
- Ganeshji, Keshavji, 151
- Garhmukteshwar, 378
- Garrett, J. R., 138, 141, 168, 190-1, 194,
199, 206
- George, Lloyd, 84, 85, 86
- Ghatge, B. A., 124
- Ghosh, Prafulla, 310, 320, 323-6, 330,
338, 525
- Ghosh, Sudhir, 365, 366
- Ghubar-i-Khatir, 323
- Gibson, E. G., 273-6
- Gidwani, A. T., 90
- Gita, 190, 191, 231, 297, 324, 467
- Goa, 508
- Godfrey, J. H., V.-Adm., 354
- Godse, Nathuram, 468
- Gokaldas, 80
- Gole, P. B., 269
- Golwalkar, 497
- Gopal, S., 184, 354n, 359n
- Gopaldas, Bhaktiba, 110
- Gopaldas, Darbar, 110, 120, 122-3, 147,
151, 154, 234, 249, 251, 314
- Gordon, R., 210, 211
- Gore (engineer), 139, 141
- Gowan, Sir Hyde, 268
- Gracie, Gen., 444
- Gujarat Club, 36-9, 78
- Gujarat floods (1927), 138-41, 238
- Gujarat Sabha, 38-45, 47n, 53-5, 70, 89
- Gujarat Samachar*, 322
- Gujarat Vidyapith, 110, 125, 137, 147,
148, 253
- Gupta, C. B., 516
- Gupta, D. B., 520
- Gwyer, Sir Maurice, 275-6, 289
- Hallett, M. G., 242, 318, 319
- Hardinge, Lord, 87, 94
- Harijan, 229, 230, 234-5, 240, 253
- Harijan*, 125, 229-30
- Harrison, Agatha, 228, 239-40
- Hartshorn, 159, 168
- Hayward, Sir Maurice, 123-4
- Healey, Dan, 106, 166
- Heber, Bishop Reginald, 5
- Henderson, Arthur, 394
- Henderson, Loy, 508, 511
- Heycock, W. B., 39
- 'Hijratis', 196, 205, 213
- Hind Swaraj*, 76
- Hindi, 521, 522
- Hindu Mahasabha, 270, 308, 418, 461,
466, 472, 499
- Hindu Raj, 262
- Hindu-Muslim problem, The, 38, 86, 92,
145-6, 159, 163-4, 172, 209, 222-3,
260, 262, 275-6, 278, 285, 289-93, 299,
303, 307, 352, 377, 403, 438, 449, 504,
523
- Hindustan Times*, The, 322, 389, 498
- Hirachand, Walchand, 236, 253, 290-1,
299, 313, 490
- Hiralalbhai, Rao Saheb, 38, 39, 40, 53,
54
- Hitler, 271, 277, 282-3, 292-3, 336, 347,
351
- Hoare, Sir Samuel, 212, 215, 220-1,
226-8
- Hodson, H. V., 409, 413
- Holkar, Malharrao, 6-7
- Home Rule, 38
- Hore, J. W., 85
- Horniman, B. G., 72, 75
- House of Commons, 165, 305, 312, 357,
361, 403
- Hubback, 266, 267
- Hudson, Frank, 199
- Hunter Commission, 82, 86
- Hyderabad, accession of, 434-9, 449-50,
473-85, 489, 520
- Iengar, H. V. R., 374, 406, 459, 482, 515
- Independence movement, *see* Swaraj
- Independent*, The, 101
- Independent Congress Party, 146
- India Wins Freedom*, 48, 327
- Indian Independence Bill, 410, 411, 412
- Indian National Army (INA), 348, 352,
354, 441
- Indian National Congress, 37-8, 40, 49,
74, 81-2, 84, 105, 110-3, 115, 117, 121,
134, 140, 146, 150, 163, 170, 172, 181,
194, 199, 212, 230, 242, 245-6, 256-7,
289, 314, 350; sessions: Calcutta
(1920), 88, 170, 172-3, 182, 281, 422;
Nagpur (1920), 88-9, 95, 102, 114;
Ahmedabad (1921), 101, 104, 131,
136; Gaya (1922-3), 112-4; Delhi,
(1923), 117, 133; Belgaum (1924),

- 132; Kanpur (1925), 149; Gauhati (1926), 149, 185; Madras (1927), 149, 171; Calcutta (1928), 170-3; Lahore (1929), 182, 185; Karachi (1931), 203-5, 224; Bombay (1934), 247-8; Lucknow (1936), 254-5; Faizpur (1936), 258; Haripura (1937), 264-6, 272; Tripuri (1939), 280; Ramgarh (1940), 292; Meerut (1946), 383; Jaipur (1948), 493, 497; Nasik (1950), 526-7
- Instrument of Accession, 411-5, 443, 449
- Interim Government, 363, 372, 374, 377, 392, 417
- INTUC (Indian National Trade Union Congress), 490
- Irwin, Lord, 141, 149, 165-6, 184-5, 192, 196, 199-203, 205, 209, 213, 216-7
- Ismay, Lord, 393, 398
- Ittehad-ul-Musilmeen, 476
- Iyengar, Srinivasa, 149, 185
- Iyer, Ranga, 229-30
- Jallianwalla Bagh, 79, 82, 84-7, 430
- Jama Masjid, 76
- Jamnadas, 238
- Jamsaheb of Nawanagar, The, 276, 408, 438, 460
- Jayakar, M. R., 102, 146, 195, 199, 200, 209, 500
- Jehangir, Sir Cowasji, 259, 261
- Jenkins, Evan, 389, 419
- Jha, L. K., 428
- Jinnah, M. A., 27, 38, 75, 82, 84, 88, 102, 285, 289, 292, 305-6, 326, 332, 335, 338-9, 344-7, 351, 353, 355-9, 361, 363, 366, 372-3, 376-7, 380, 382-93, 396, 399-400, 402-3, 408, 412, 415, 420, 427, 435-9, 441-42, 444, 448, 450, 482, 499; relations with Patel, 41, 72, 89, 135, 261-2, 331, 336, 362, 364, 368-9, 381, 394, 482
- Joshi, Chhaganlal, 232, 239
- Joshi, Sir Moropant, 116-7
- Joshi, Umashankar, 169
- Junagadh, 413, 433-6, 439, 441-2, 449
- Kairon, P. S., 516
- Kalelkar, Kaka, 37, 90, 113
- Kamal, Mustafa, 130
- Kania, Justice, 237
- Kanuga, Balwantray, 34, 37, 47, 77, 80, 127, 135, 148, 190, 198, 298, 466, 487, 515, 529
- Kanuga, Nandubehn, 34-5, 129, 190, 198, 297, 514
- Kapadia, Hiralal, 139
- Karlott, Boris, 53
- Kashmir, accession of, 413, 433-4, 437-9, 461, 475-6, 517, 518
- Kaur, Rajkumari Amrit, 375, 417, 467
- Kelavani Mandal, 133, 134
- Ker, James, 62
- Keskar, B. V., 374
- Khadi, 93, 131-2, 137, 143, 146, 150, 186, 187, 198, 214, 229, 296-7, 334, 343, 422
- Khaliquzzaman, Chaudhry, 262, 421
- Khan, Khan Abdul Ghaffar, 90, 132, 209, 212, 242, 251, 293-4, 351, 352, 358, 393, 401-5
- Khan, Abdul Qaiyum, 441
- Khan, Ajmal, 91, 102
- Khan, Akbar, Gen., 441
- Khan, Fateh Mohammad, 274, 275
- Khan, Khizr Hyat, 345, 351, 388, 389
- Khan, Khurshid Ahmed, 428
- Khan, Liaqat Ali, 338-9, 339n, 344, 349, 363, 377-8, 381, 388, 399, 402, 416, 419, 420-1, 425, 427, 431, 436, 448, 475, 498-9
- Khan, M. S., 355
- Khan, Shafaat Ahmed, 377
- Khan, Sikander Hyat, 326
- Khan, Zafrullah, 449
- Khan, Sahib, Dr., 212, 242, 259, 404
- Khare, N. B., 259, 268-72
- Khare, Narayan Moreshwar, 265
- Kheda satyagraha, 43-9, 54-7, 58-73, 75, 130, 185, 249, 515
- Kher, B. G., 259-61, 268, 297, 468, 472, 516, 532
- Khilafat, 84-6, 91, 93, 103, 106, 130
- Khudai Khidmatgars, 192, 206, 212
- Kidwai, R. A., 255, 417, 522-8
- Kitchlew, Saifuddin, 76-7, 79, 213, 403
- Koran, 153
- Kothari, Manilal, 147, 158
- Kripalani, Hiranand, 121, 123-4
- Kripalani, J. B., 84, 256, 277, 320, 324-7, 335n, 344, 367, 370, 374, 383, 400, 402, 425, 473; relations with Patel, 61, 83, 90, 125, 189, 247-8, 254, 293, 310, 316, 321, 323, 330, 333, 337, 347, 371, 378-9, 401, 403, 474, 521, 523, 527; on Patel, 61, 172-3, 183, 257, 371, 417, 524-5
- Kripalani, Sucheta, 421, 426

- Krishnadas, 98, 144
 Kulkarni, V. B., 271
 Kunzru, H. N., 500
- Laher, D. A., 192
 Lal, Jagat Narain, 316
 Lalbhai, Kasturbhai, 141-2, 314, 529
 Lall, K. B., 428, 495
 Lawrence, Sir Henry, 216
 Laxmi, Rani, 6
Leader, The, 226
 Liberals, 74, 172, 184
 Linlithgow, Lord, 259, 266, 269, 275, 282, 284-5, 289, 306, 313, 317-9, 327-8, 331-2
 Liquor, see Temperance
 Lloyd, Sir George, 104, 123
 Lockhart, Gen., 441
 Lohia, Rammanohar, 401, 402, 491
 Lothian, Lord, 276
 Lumsden, Sir Roger, 251, 282, 285, 313, 318, 322
 Lumsden, Miss, 216
- Macassey, 53-4
 MacDonald, Ramsay, 199, 220, 226-8
 Macleod, Justice, 135
 Maclochlan, 216
 Madanlal, 466
 Maddock, Colonel, 129
 Mahajan, Mehr Chand, 439, 440, 442-6
 Maharaj, Ravishankar, 115, 117, 120, 122-5, 140, 151, 154, 157, 160, 186, 189-90, 193, 197, 213, 297, 314, 529
 Mahmud, Syed, 196, 293, 320, 323, 331-2
 Mahtab, H. K., 320, 323-7, 363, 451-2, 454, 525
 Malaviya, Govind, 84
 Malaviya, Madan Mohan, 81, 82, 84, 88, 97, 102, 146, 188, 194-5, 215-6, 228-30, 248
 Mamdot, Khan of, 389
Manchester Guardian, 284
 Mandal, J. N., 377
 Mao, Zedong, 509
 Masani, Minoo, 266
 Mashruwala, Kishorlal G., 37, 90, 125, 183, 184, 302
 Master, Alfred, 39, 185-97, 199, 206-7
 Matthai, John, 363-4, 375, 417, 426, 463, 491
 Mavlankar, G. V., 43, 53, 73, 94, 119, 236, 474; relations with Patel, 31-2, 34, 37, 39, 54, 59, 70, 101, 126, 142, 297
- Maxwell, Reginald, 139, 168, 170, 349
 Meherally, Yusuf, 312
 Mehta, Asoka, 312, 316, 490
 Mehta, Balwantray, 154
 Mehta, Dinshaw, 347
 Mehta, D. K., 269
 Mehta, Hansa, 195
 Mehta, Jivaraj, 315
 Mehta, Kalyanji, 96, 151, 166
 Mehta, Kunverji, 95, 98, 151
 Mehta, Sharda, 154, 166
 Mehta, Sir Chunilal, 167
 Mehta, Sumant, 154
Memoirs of an Old Parliamentarian, 190
 Menon, K. P. S., 508
 Menon, V. K. K., 393, 398
 Menon, V. P., 374, 380, 385-7, 389, 391, 393-4, 398, 400, 402, 408-18, 428-9, 434, 436-7, 440-4, 451-7, 464, 473-8, 480-2, 495, 515, 529-30.
 Mievile, Eric, 398
 Miller, Webb, 192
 Minto-Morley Reforms, 25
 Mirabehn, (Madelienne Slade), 137, 301, 311, 316-7
 Mishra, D. P., 268-9, 372-3, 506, 516
 Mody, Homi, 327
 Mody, Kuberdas, 135
 Monckton, Sir Walter, 449, 476-9
 Montagu, Edwin, 40, 94, 105; on Tilak, 49
 Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms, 72, 74, 82, 133
 Mookerjee, S. P., 417-8, 462, 498, 500
 Moon, Penderel, 262
 Moonje, P. S., 146
 Moplah Rebellion, 92-3
 Moraes, Frank, 262
 Mountbatten, Lord, Louis 36, 385, 387, 392-420, 425, 428, 434, 436-7, 441-3, 450, 462-8, 473-9, 507; relations with Patel, 391-6, 399, 402, 406, 408-9, 409, 412-9, 429, 448-9, 462-4,
 Mudie, Sir Francis, 444
 Mukherji, Sir Manmath Nath, 268
 Munshi, Fateh Mohamed, 39
 Munshi, K. M., 82, 161, 165, 167, 248, 259, 261-3, 278, 285; 297-8, 407, 450, 478, 482, 499, 517
 Muslim Conference, 439
 Muslim League, 38, 171, 261, 262, 289, 290, 292, 303n, 304, 307, 314, 331, 335-6, 339, 345, 351-7, 364, 368, 369,

- 376, 378, 384-90, 402, 404, 435, 461
Mussolini, 226, 278
- Nagpur Jail, 114
Nagpur satyagraha, *see* Flag satyagraha
Naidu, Sarojini, 75, 95, 146, 192, 215, 235, 310, 316-7, 400; on Patel, 168-9
Namagiri, 210
Nambudiripad, E. M. S., 183, 258
Nanda, Gulzarilal, 141, 142
Narayan, J. P., 265, 293-5, 401-2, 474, 518; relations with Patel, 249-50, 254, 283, 302, 469, 491.
Narayan, Prabhavati, 249-50
Nariman, K. F., 238, 265-6, 270-2, 302; dispute with Patel, 259-61
Nasik Jail, 233-4, 238-9, 240, 242, 249, 334
National Conference, 442
Navajivan, 105, 106, 109, 113, 155, 159, 193
Nayar, Sushila, 462, 472, 473, 531
Nazism, 282, 284
Nehru, Jawaharlal, 27-8, 84, 88, 90, 95, 97-8, 104-5, 113-4, 132, 134, 149, 171-2, 185-6, 191, 196, 199-200, 203-4, 209, 212, 230-1, 241-2, 246-7, 252-4, 259, 261-2, 270, 277-9, 282-5, 292, 294, 296, 300-12, 315, 317, 320, 323, 326-7, 329, 331, 333, 335, 344-6, 349, 352-3, 357-9, 362-4, 369, 374, 377, 379-80, 387, 389, 392-3, 401-3, 412, 414, 419, 421, 425-8, 431, 434-7, 439-42, 446, 454, 462, 463, 466, 475, 478, 491, 521-33; relations with Patel, 28, 98, 114, 134, 138, 143, 171, 181-5, 194, 202, 254-8, 263-5, 284, 297, 301-2, 308, 316, 324-5, 332, 336-7, 347-8, 356, 370-3, 383-4, 398-9, 405, 417, 427, 432, 443, 447-8, 458-60, 464, 468, 470-2, 489-90, 497-9, 505-9, 517-18
Nehru, Kamala, 254, 263
Nehru, Krishna, 325
Nehru, Motilal, 81, 82, 84, 88, 90, 95, 97-8, 103, 111-2, 114, 130, 146, 148-9, 164, 170, 172, 181-5, 191, 196, 199, 224
Nehru, Swaruprani, 182
Nehru Report, 171-2
Nehru-Liaquat Pact, 498, 526
Neogy, K. C., 467, 498-9
Nilkanth, Sir Ramanbhai, 38, 53, 54, 88, 141
Nimbkar, R. S., 264
Nishtar, Abdur Rab, 402, 427
Nizam of Hyderabad, The, 386, 407, 413, 433, 449; *see also* Hyderabad
Noakhali, 378, 383, 385
Non-cooperation, 86, 88-90, 97, 103, 118, 231
Non-violence, *see* Ahimsa
O'Dwyer, Michael, 77, 79, 86, 165
Pakistan, 262, 276, 284, 292, 306-8, 331, 339, 343, 351, 353, 357-61, 383, 385-6, 397, 399, 402, 404-5, 407, 418, 461-2, 497-8; and sharing of assets, 461-3
Pakvasa, Mangaldas, 234, 297, 316
Pal, Bipin Chandra, 81-2, 88
Palestine, 508
Paluskar, Vishnu Digambar, 101
Pandit, Vijayalakshmi, 310, 510
Pandya, Mohanlal, 43-5, 49, 55, 67, 70, 78, 120, 122-3, 150-4, 186, 188, 193, 249
Panikkar, K. M., 510
Pant, G. B., 259, 310, 320, 323, 326, 329-30, 467, 516, 522; relations with Patel, 256-7, 280, 324, 347, 403
Paranjpe, Sir Raghunath, 100
Parekh, Gokuldas, 44-5, 55-6
Parikh, Narhari, 7, 17, 37, 47, 60, 61, 91, 104, 118, 144, 158, 284, 291, 294, 297, 314, 515, 529
Parikh, Shankarlal, 43-5, 47n, 49, 55, 66, 515, 529
Parikh, Vanmala, 291
Parsis, 161, 259, 260
Partition Council, 415-6, 417, 420
Partition plan, 399, 400, 401, 404
Partition riots, 419, 425-33
Patanvadiyas, 119-20, 124, 125
Patel, Ashabhai Lallubhai, 193, 213, 267
Patel, B. P., 323, 328
Patel, Bhanumati, 298, 304, 328-9, 334, 472, 529, 533
Patel, Bipin, 225, 240, 245, 272, 290, 298, 473, 533
Patel, Dahiba, 7, 31, 34, 94
Patel, Dahyabhai, 9, 19, 22-5, 31, 34-5, 46, 84, 90, 93, 127, 139, 147, 178, 190, 215, 225, 227, 235, 240, 245, 250, 253, 271, 290, 298, 304, 320, 322, 329, 332-4, 339, 472-3, 489, 516, 529, 533
Patel, Deevi, 304
Patel, Diwaliba, 21-2, 24-5
Patel, Gautam, 472, 529

- Patel, G. I., 22, 111, 236, 237, 240
- Patel, H. M., 380, 401, 415, 416, 428, 443, 482, 515
- Patel, Jhaverba, 8-9, 15-7, 19, 21-5, 35, 46n, 119, 532-3
- Patel, Jhaverbhai, 4-8, 13, 19-20, 34, 141, 264
- Patel, Kahandas, 8
- Patel, Kanjibhai, 529
- Patel, Kashibhai, 7, 15-6, 25, 28, 84, 120-1, 197, 225, 240, 264
- Patel, Khushalbhai, 150-1, 156
- Patel, Ladba, 3-7, 16, 34, 125-6, 141, 178, 197, 225, 264, 532
- Patel, Makanji P., 156, 158, 291-2
- Patel, Manibehn, 8-9, 19, 21n, 22-5, 31, 34-5, 46, 73-4, 84, 90, 93, 106, 113, 125-9, 139, 147-8, 154, 163, 177, 190, 195-6, 198, 224-5, 235, 238, 240-2, 245, 249-53, 273-5, 283, 290-1, 297-9, 302, 308-16, 320, 328-30, 333-6, 339, 340, 343, 366, 374, 379-80, 383, 385, 387, 391, 400, 421-2, 425, 430, 432-4, 467, 469, 472-3, 489, 493-4, 507, 514, 516, 528-33
- Patel, Manibhai, 240
- Patel, Morarbhai, 219
- Patel, Narayanbhai, 3
- Patel, Narsibhai, 3, 7-8, 12, 15-6, 19, 28, 34, 178
- Patel, Pashabhai, 290, 308
- Patel, P. T., 236
- Patel, P. U., 271
- Patel, Raojibhai, 56, 70, 122, 239
- Patel, Shamhubhai, 3
- Patel, Somabhai, 7-8, 12, 15, 19, 34, 147, 197, 240, 264
- Patel, V. K., 156, 158, 210
- Patel, Vallabhbhai, (Sardar), *passim*; early childhood of, 3-12; choice of career of, 12-13; marriage of, 8, 9, 15, 23-4; law schooling of, 13; law career of, 16-19, 20, 23, 32-36, 81; in England, 25-31; entry into politics of, 34, 38-9; encounter with Mahatma Gandhi; 36-41, 47, 48; in Ahmedabad municipality, 38-44, 53-5, 73-6, 134; & Kheda struggle, 55-6, 58-68; & Ahmedabad textile workers' strike, 57-8; & Bardoli satyagraha, 95-105, 142-70; & flag satyagraha, 114-6; & Borsad satyagraha, 119-24; in jail, 188-91, 195-6, 214-24, 226-9, 319-37, 340; and Nehru's elevation, 181-4, 247, 253, 254, 256, 257, 258, 282, 301-2, 350, 369-72, 379, 382, 383-4; as GPCC chief, 101; as Congress President, 202-52; as Congress election organizer, 248; as organizer of Haripura Congress session, 264; in Congress Parliamentary Board, 266; in Interim Government, 375-422; and accession of states, 405-15, 433-58, 475-85, 500-1; as Home Minister, 425-85, 489-533; death of 530-3; appearance of, 14-15, 35, 170, 189, 492; on himself, 137; and children, 23-24, 31, 34, 46, 125-9, 147, 148, 225-6, 334; and untouchability, 110-11; humour of, 26, 99, 144, 157, 160, 189, 195, 216-8, 229, 271, 321, 322, 347, 504; *see also* Azad (Abul Kalam), Bajaj (Jamnalal), Birla (G. D.), Bose (Subhas Chandra), Desai (Bhulabahi), Desai (Mahadev), Gandhi (Mahatma), Jinnah (M. A.), Kripalani (J. B.), Mavlanker (G. V.), Mountbatten (Louis), Narayan (J. P.), Nehru (Jawaharlal), Pant (G. B.), Patel (Vithalbhai), Sitaramayya (Pattabhi), Prasad (Rajendra), Rajagopalachari (Chakravarti), & Wavell (A. E.).
- Patel, Vithalbhai, 6-8, 10, 12, 15-6, 25, 27-8, 31, 35, 41, 44, 47, 55, 56, 75, 94, 102-3, 132, 134, 138, 140, 147, 162, 167, 178, 181-2, 184, 195, 202, 221, 236-8, 240, 264, 277, 533; relations with Patel, 13, 17-9, 20-3, 26, 33-4, 38, 95, 104, 105, 111-2, 114, 116, 117, 119, 141, 163, 234-5, 265, 533
- Patel, Yashoda, 147, 178, 190, 225
- Patidars, code of the, 4-5, 20, 22, 181
- Patil, S. K., 260, 266, 516, 522
- Pattani, Sir Prabhashankar, 143
- Patwardhan, Achyut, 254, 260, 266, 310, 355, 356
- Peel, 117
- Perry, E. W., 206, 207
- Pethick-Lawrence, 357, 365-7, 369, 374, 381-2
- Petit, Mithubehn, 154, 163, 166
- Picketing, 200, 206, 210
- Pilsna, 212
- Plague, the, 15, 16, 42-43
- Prasad, Brij Kishore, 97, 249
- Prasad, Rajendra, 84, 88, 90, 97, 134, 184, 192, 199, 228, 234, 239, 248-9, 265,

- 270, 277, 278, 282, 306, 312, 320, 345, 439, 466, 474, 478, 493, 500, 504-6, 522, 526, 531-3; relations with Patel, 61, 83, 104, 112-4, 118, 203, 213, 247, 252-5, 259, 267, 279-81, 301-2, 310, 347, 349, 363, 366, 371, 375, 389, 396, 401, 416-8, 421, 465, 474, 504-7, 522, 533
- Prasad, Shanker, 459
- Pratt, Frederick, 41-2, 45, 53-5, 58-68, 72, 76-8, 84, 100, 104, 123-4, 135
- Prajabandhu*, 73
- Prakasam, T., 90
- Princely states, 101; accession of, 405-15, 417, 433-64, 475-84, 500-1, 530; *see also* Hyderabad, Junagadh, Kashmir; Patel's confrontation with, 272-8, 279
- Provincial Council elections, 251-8, 266
- Punjab Boundary Force, 419, 425
- Pyarelal, 238, 262
- Quit India movement, 306-8, 312-3, 315-7, 320, 327, 331-7, 344-8, 351, 353, 370, 402, 491, 504
- Qureshi, Ghulam Rasul, 300, 352
- Radcliffe, Sir Cyril, 419-21, 434
- Radhakrishnan, Sir, S., 421
- Rajagopalachari, Chakravarti, 77, 84, 88, 90, 97, 104-5, 132, 163, 168, 184, 186, 192, 206, 228, 234, 241-2, 247-9, 258-9, 263, 267, 270, 279, 282, 286, 306, 310, 320, 350, 358, 364, 387, 393, 397, 460, 471, 489, 521, 531-2; relations with Patel, 76, 95, 112-4, 117-8, 130, 133, 145, 179-81, 185, 203, 210, 212-3, 230-2, 246, 252-6, 280, 293-5, 300-4, 307-9, 311, 331-3, 336, 348-9, 362-3, 366, 368, 376, 389, 397, 401, 416, 418, 474, 481-2, 504-7, 511, 514, 517, 522-6, 528, 530, 533
- Rai, Lajpat, 88, 95, 97-8, 103, 146, 149, 530
- Rai, Ranjit, Lt. Col., 443-4
- Rajendrasinhji, Lt. Gen., 482-3
- Rajguru, 201, 203-4
- Ram, Jagjivan, 363, 364, 375, 417
- Ramayana*, 190
- Rambhai, 124
- Ramkrishna, 226
- Randhawa, M. S., 429, 432, 458
- Rao, K. V., 516
- Rau, Sir B. N., 365, 500
- Raval, Ravishankar, 264
- Razakars, 476, 481
- Razvi, Kasim, 476, 477, 483
- Reader's Digest*, 322
- Reading, Lord, 91, 94-5, 97, 102-3
- Reddy, K. C., 516
- Rees, Maj. Gen. T. W., 419
- Reservations, 503
- Rolland, Romain, 226
- Roosevelt, 305, 339
- Round Table Conference, 102, 199, 201, 204, 209-10, 216, 227
- Rowlatt, Sir Sydney, 74, 309
- Rowlatt Bills, 74-5
- Rowlatt Act, 76, 82, 87
- R.S.S., 461, 466, 471-2, 496-7
- Sabarmati Ashram, 45, 55, 72-5, 77, 146-8, 150, 163, 164, 188, 300, 529
- Sabarmati Jail, 188, 196, 198, 224-5, 228, 233, 240, 297
- Sachar, Bhimsen, 520
- Salam, Amtus, 222-3
- Salt satyagraha, 186, 191-2, 200, 221, 309
- Sankey, Lord, 222
- Santhaam, K., 389
- Santiniketan, 264
- Sapru, Tej Bahadur, 172, 184, 195, 199, 200, 209, 228, 258
- Sarabhai, Ambalal, 30, 55, 58, 73, 136, 141-2, 189-90, 236, 240, 529
- Sarabhai, Anasuya, 55, 57, 78, 145
- Sarabhai, Mridula, 240, 274-5, 299, 329, 374, 469, 522, 524
- Sarabhai, Sarladevi, 30, 73
- 'Sardar', 98, 109, 158, 168, 173, 211, 232, 249, 348, 350
- Sarvodaya*, 76
- Sastri, Srinivasa, 199, 200, 218, 227
- Satyagraha, 37, 45-6, 48, 55, 66, 67, 72, 74-5, 78-9, 111, 113, 115, 116-7, 119, 298, 300
- Satyagraha Patrika*, 76
- Satyagrahi*, 77
- Satyamurti, S., 310, 328
- Satyapal, Dr., 76, 77, 79
- Saudi Arabia, 85
- Scott, Sir Basil, 30, 31, 36
- Sen, Brig. L. P., 444-5
- Sendak, Major, 321-2
- Servants of India Society, 44, 148
- Setalvad, Motilal, 237
- Setalvad, Sir Chimanlal, 81, 237
- Sevagram, 253, 264, 294, 299, 300, 302, 313, 330

- Shah, K. T., 500
 Shah, Mohanlal, 196-7, 199
 Shah, Phoolchand, 80, 119, 122, 191, 238
 Shah, Shantilal, 347
 Shah, Uttamchand, 156, 177, 213, 291
 Shanker, Vidya, 378, 380, 429-30, 469-70, 472-3, 494-5, 511, 514-5, 529-30, 533
 Shareef, Mohammed Yusuf, 268, 269
 Sharma, Balkrishna, 181
 Shaw, Bernard, 216
 Sheean, Vincent, 490
 Shillidy, John, 38-9
 Shraddhanand, Swami, 76
 Shukla, Ravi Shankar, 268-70, 350, 516
 Sikhs, 217, 227, 233, 389, 401, 402, 403, 419, 429, 430, 502-3
 Simon Commission, 149, 170-1
 Singh, Baldev, 363-4, 375, 381, 402-3, 417, 429, 439, 442-3, 445, 478
 Singh, Bhagat, 201, 203-4
 Singh, Dalip, 445
 Singh, Gurdial, Brig., 437
 Singh, Hari, 434, 435, 439-43, 445, 449
 Singh, Kulwant, Maj. Gen., 445
 Singh, Narain, Lt. Col., 440
 Singh, Brig. Rajinder, 440
 Singh, Yadavindra, 412
 Sinha, Satyanarayan, 505, 507, 527
 Sinha, Shrikrishna, 259, 267
 Sircar, N. R., 327
 Sitaramayya, Pattabhi, 185, 201, 213, 245, 278, 280, 294, 319, 321, 325-6, 328, 333, 338, 520, 522, 526; relations with Patel, 320-24, 347, 493, 525
 Sladen, J. M., 320
 Sly, Sir Frank, 116, 117
 Smart, W. W., 138, 160, 162, 166
 Smith, Sir Norman, 387
 Smyth, J. W., 155
 Sobhani, Umar, 75
 Socialists, 246, 254, 265, 301, 356, 401-2, 490-1, 493
 South Africa, 36 56, 88, 150, 154
 Spens, Sir Patrick, 416
 Stalin, 282
Statesman, The, 15n, 115, 364, 376, 469
 Stephens, Ian, 15n
 Sukhdev, 201, 203, 204
 Suhrawardy, H. S., 376, 418, 428, 483
Sunday Times, 438
 Swaminarayan sect, the, 7, 20, 34, 69
 Swaraj, 37-8, 40, 41, 42, 59, 64, 78, 95, 96, 101-5, 143, 152, 158, 186, 201, 204, 209, 224, 229, 230, 247, 300, 307, 344, 348
 Swaraj Ashram (Bardoli), 177, 213, 219
 Swarajists, 112, 114, 116-7, 119, 130-2, 146, 170, 185, 248
 Swaraj Party, 241, 248
 Tagore, Rabindranath, 90, 93, 228, 300
 Talati, Gokaldas, 119, 191
Talwar, 354
 Tandon, P. D., 113, 401, 403, 493, 520-31
 Tara Singh, 389, 429, 493
 Tata, J. R. D., 492
 Taylor, 190
 Temperance, 143, 145, 150, 153, 178, 199, 206, 289
 Thackersey, Lady Premlila, 231
 Thakkar, Amritlal, 44
 Thakore, Balwantrao, 134, 135
 Tibet, 509-13, 529-30
 Tilak, Bal Gangadhar, 37-8, 41, 49, 65, 72, 74, 81-2, 86, 88, 91, 93, 179, 195
Time, 322
Times of India, The, 44, 115, 134, 156, 165, 190, 321, 322
Tribune, The, 260
 Trivedi, Chandulal, 452
 Turkey, 84, 85, 87, 94
 Tyabji, Abbas, 96, 101, 154, 161-2, 166, 352
 Tyagi, Mahavir, 503, 514
 Untouchability, 100-1, 110, 124, 132, 143-5, 153, 179, 204, 209-10, 220, 222, 226, 229, 296, 305, 344, 433, 503
 Untouchability Abolition League, 228
 Valerawala, Kumar, 274
 'Veth', 41-2, 43, 53
Viceroy's Journal, 388
 Vincent, Sir William, 70
Vir Vallabhbai, 180
 Virawala, 272-6, 438
 Vithal Nagar, 264, 265
 Vithalbhai Memorial Trust, 237
 Vivekananda, Swami, 226
 Wadia, A. R., on Patel, 30
 Wadia, B. J., 237
 Wavell, Lord A. E., 36, 270, 331-2, 334, 337, 339, 339n, 343-5, 347-9, 351, 353-4, 356-9, 361-9, 371-8, 380, 385-9; relations with Patel, 345, 353, 358-9, 367-8, 374, 376-8, 380, 387-8

- Webb, Beatrice, 301
Wellington, Duke of, 319
Willingdon, Lord, 55, 62, 206, 208-9,
212-3, 226, 230, 233-4
Wilson, Sir Leslie, 123-4, 165-8
Winterton, Lord, 165
Wylie, Francis, 269-70, 289
Wyatt, Woodrow, 368
Yagnik, Indulal, 70, 75, 86, 113
Yeravda Jail, 113, 194-6, 198, 214-9,
221-6, 231-4, 241-2, 264, 297-8, 309,
317, 319, 329, 334, 339, 343
Yeravda Pact, 228
Young India, 80, 96, 105-6, 112, 114, 180,
189
Zaheer, Ali, 377
Zetland, Lord, 267, 269, 282, 284-5, 290,
451

continued from front flap

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